

Prayerful Iconoclasts

Psalm Seals and Elite Formation in the First Iconoclast Era (726–750)

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For the Byzantine elite, the reign of Leo III (717–741 CE) was a period of transformation and stabilization. The remaining families of the old land-owning Roman senatorial and curial class were replaced by individuals whose power was based on imperial titles, service, and patronage.¹ Although we know that this transformation occurred, it is difficult to trace the process, due to the lack of evidence that is contemporary, or indeed, unclouded by the bias of later iconophile polemic. To fill this gap, sigillography is an essential source base, not only for what it can tell us about prosopography and the structure and functioning of the Byzantine state (in lieu of contemporary written sources or *taktika* as exist in later periods), but also because seals are personal—yet public—objects through which officials presented themselves as members of a rapidly concretizing service elite centered in Constantinople.

In this paper, I will analyze how a group of Byzantine seals mark a subgroup of this elite that emerged at the forefront of Byzantine society at the beginning of the iconoclast era. I will discuss the context and purpose of this seal group, how it relates to the first iconoclast period, and how this story fits into the wider

discussion of elite formation in the eighth century. The common feature shared by these seals is that they all contain quotations of the Psalms, and represent nearly the only quotations—scriptural² or otherwise³—that

2 There are a small number of seals that contain quotations or paraphrases of psalms, but come from later centuries—the 11th (A. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden* [Vienna, 2011], nos. 1160, 1162, 1163), and the 13th–14th (ibid., no. 248)—and should be viewed as variants of metrical seals. Imperial seals of iconoclast emperors—which will be discussed below—often contain the Trinitarian formula “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). There is only one non-imperial seal with a biblical quotation that does not come from a psalm: the seal of Plato, datable probably to the late seventh century although Zacos dates it from 550 to 650; G. Zacos and A. Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel, 1972), no. 1103. This is a very peculiar seal because of its portrait of Christ—a rarity on a non-imperial seal, especially before iconoclasm; see J. Cotsonis, “To Invoke or Not to Invoke the Image of Christ on Byzantine Lead Seals: That Is the Question,” *RN* 170 (2013): 549–82, placed on the top part of the reverse, above a quotation from Christ’s parable of the sheep and the goats: Δεῦτε οἱ εὐλογημένοι τοῦ Πατρὸς (“Come, you who are blessed by my Father,” Matthew 25:34, ESV). This sigillographic style with imagery placed above linear inscriptions is typical of seals of *kommerkiarioi*, although in those cases, the depictions are of emperors, not Christ; e.g., N. Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC, 1986), nos. 2–7, 10, 14, 15, 17, 19. However, Plato’s seal’s placement of the icon of Christ above the text is not unique; see an iconographic parallel in the seal of George, patriarch of Antioch, datable to the late 7th century (ibid., no. 16).

3 A small number of sigillographic epigrams—i.e., metrical inscriptions—are poems known from elsewhere, although in these cases the seal epigrams seem to be the earliest known versions; for a

1 On this most recently and comprehensively, see L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: A History* (Cambridge, 2011), 573–771; on the earlier portion of the eighth century, see J. Haldon, *The Empire That Would Not Die* (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 159–92.

occur on Byzantine seals. This short-lived sigillographic trend was, moreover, restricted to prominent early iconoclast lay officials. The connection between this group of elites, the imperial court, and iconoclasm is elucidated particularly by three of these seal owners: Sisinnios, *patrikios* and *strategos*, who may be the first attested *strategos* of the Thrakesioi; Yazīd, whose career path we can trace through his many extant seals; and Beser or Bashīr, a well-known figure in the development of Byzantine iconoclasm. Based partially on the seals of these three individuals, I argue that psalm seal owners used psalmic quotations in the place of images to showcase a particular sort of piety that marked them as part of an elite group with particularly iconoclast sympathies. Finally, I discuss the apotropaic nature of these quotations, including their similarity to Levantine amulets, and the essential but fluid role that prayer played in Byzantine seals. Overall, these seals remind us that iconoclastic tendencies were not incongruent with innovation.

Until now, there has been essentially no scholarly analysis of these psalm seals as a group, apart from an often referenced—but very limited—discussion in the catalogue of George Zacos, over forty years ago.⁴ This group of seals can be dated to the middle half of the eighth century, more specifically to the first quarter century of iconoclasm, ca. 726–750 CE. During the eighth century, the simple, laconic, often monogrammatic style that characterizes sixth- and seventh-century seals started to give way to new, complex features that would come to characterize ninth- and tenth-century seals. These middle Byzantine seals contain combinations of invocations, icons, and inscriptions that include significantly more information than their late antique counterparts. In the sigillographic transitional period of the eighth century, vestiges of the older style, such as monograms that contain names and titles, were joined by newer features, such as invocative

monograms, circular inscriptions, and inscriptions within the angles of the cruciform monograms.⁵ This period of sigillographic experimentation provides the underlying context for the innovation seen in these psalm seals.

The Corpus of Psalm Seals

In the extant group of psalm seals are at least 15 individuals represented by 21 seal types in over 50 specimens, 28 of which are in the Dumbarton Oaks collection.⁶ These seals belonged to lay officials, often of very high rank and office, such as *hypatos*,⁷ *patrikios*, and *strategos*.⁸ The seals are generally quite similar. They consist of a combination of cruciform monograms with inscriptions in any of three places: in the angles of the cruciform monogram, in lines on the reverse, and in a circle around the monogram. The quotation from a psalm is typically found in the last of these. Most resemble the seals of Epiphanius, *patrikios* and *strategos* (appendix, no. 5). On his seals, a monogram that resolves to the name Ἐπιφάνιου is found on the obverse, with a quotation from a psalm in a circle around it. On the reverse is the monogram for πατρικίου, with the words “καὶ στρατηγού” written in the angles, and again a quotation from a psalm encircles it. Other psalm seals are generally quite similar, and seem to come from roughly the same period, the second quarter of the eighth century, corresponding to the reign of Leo III and the first decade of the reign of Constantine V.⁹ The psalm

discussion of this limited corpus and the appearance of sigillographic epigrams—or at apparently related poems—on objects beyond seals, see A. Rhoby, “Epigrams, Epigraphy and Sigillography,” in *Ἠπειρόνδης: Proceedings of the 10th International Symposium of Byzantine Sigillography; Ioannina, 1–3. October 2009*, ed. C. Stavrakos and B. Papadopoulou (Wiesbaden, 2011). Unfortunately, Rhoby does not discuss the psalm seals.

⁴ Zacos-Veglery, no. 1984. In his recent publication of a seal of Beser, D. M. Metcalf reviewed and discussed Zacos’s arguments: *Byzantine Lead Seals from Cyprus* (Nicosia, 2014), no. 1009.

⁵ Cruciform invocative monograms became commonplace in the late 7th century, while circular inscriptions and inscriptions in the angles of cruciform monograms appeared in the 8th. Iconography largely disappeared in this period, before returning in the 9th century. See Oikonomides, *Dated Seals*, 152–53.

⁶ See the catalogue below, which includes only those published and in the DO collection, including some previously unrecognized examples. There are doubtless more members of this group yet to be identified in collections around the world.

⁷ On the development of titles in the 8th century, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 593.

⁸ In the 8th century, *strategoi* typically held the title of *patrikios*, but not always. Cf. Lykastos, *hypatos*, imperial *spatharios*, and *strategos* (of Kephallonia), Zacos-Veglery, nos. 918–19, *DOSeals* 2:1.15a–g.

⁹ This precise dating is based on typological techniques elaborated by Oikonomides in *Dated Seals* (e.g., the thickness and style of the epigraphy combined with circular inscriptions set around monograms that are not merely invocative), on particular invocative

is found in the circular inscription in every instance except one, the seal of Sergios, imperial *strator*, published by George Zacos.¹⁰ On this seal, the psalm is written in lines on the reverse. Obverse invocative monograms are common, like the seal of Theodotos the *hypatos* (no. 18). These invocative monograms typically read Θεοτόκε βοήθει, although Κύριε βοήθει and Ἁγία Τριάς βοήθει are also found. The words τῷ σῷ δούλῳ are often inscribed in the angles of the cruciform invocative monogram, a feature that becomes common in eighth-century seals and persists for centuries thereafter; in these cases, the invocation reads, “Theotokos, help your servant,” as on the seals of Sisinnios, *patrikios* and *strategos* (nos. 14–15). Or, in another feature typical of the eighth century, we find the name of the owner of the seal in the angles of the cruciform, as on the seal of Peter the *hypatos* (no. 12).

This seal of Peter contains a quotation from both Psalms 139 and 42,¹¹ the two most common of the six psalms quoted on these seals (table 1),¹² often appearing together.¹³ This combination can be seen, for example, on the seals of Epiphanius (no. 5), where the obverse contains part of Psalm 139:1, and the reverse, part of Psalm 42:1. This is particularly worth noting, because if the quotation from Psalm 139 had been continued on the reverse, it would have greatly resembled the quoted portion of Psalm 42: i.e., “ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου ῥύσαι με,”¹⁴ instead of “ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπου ἀδίκου καὶ δολίου ῥύσαι με.”

Yet on this seal, as on all others that quote Psalm 42—whether in combination with Psalm 139 or not—the wording is slightly corrupted, as ἀνθρώπου is replaced with ἀνδρὸς. While the insertion of ἀνδρὸς for ἀνθρώπου does not significantly change the meaning of the psalm, and is in fact an attested variation

of the verse,¹⁵ this particular word switch shows the influence of Psalm 139 with which this quotation from Psalm 42 is often combined on these seals. The choice to use this variation can be explained in several possible ways: either (i) to add more letters to the reverse to better match the length of the circular inscriptions, (ii) by mistake, due to quotation from memory and confusion of the two verses, or (iii) to make the two sides match syllabically for some metrical purpose.¹⁶ The first hypothesis seems unlikely, since, on each seal that combines the two psalms, the two sides have different numbers of letters in their circular inscriptions.¹⁷ The second has some plausibility, in that the seals belonged to laymen, not monastics or ecclesiastics, and would therefore be less likely to be beholden to the written form of the verses. However, the third option offers a more satisfactory explanation, particularly in light of the variations within the wider psalm seal corpus. For with the ἀνδρὸς-ἀνθρώπου substitution, the quotation on each side has fourteen syllables, made up of two seven-syllable hemistichs.¹⁸ The combination of these verses seems to be an intentional cross-stitching

15 E.g., in the commentary of Diodoros of Tarsos on the Psalms (CCSG 6, s.v. Psalm 42:1), or in the commentary of Origen, where both versions are given successively (PG 12:1420), or in the *Sacra Parallela* attributed to John of Damascus (PG 96:280d).

16 Other than the similarity between the two verses, I have not found any compelling reason for their combination here, such as their similar use liturgically, or their association by a particular Church Father.

17 Because of abbreviations and ligatures, these seals fluctuate in length. There does not seem to be a necessary correlation between the number of characters in the obverse and reverse circular inscriptions, and the two definitely do not need to be the same. For example, on the seal of Epiphanius (no. 5), the obverse circular inscription contains 26 characters while the reverse contains 27; on the seal of Peter the *hypatos* (no. 12), the obverse contains 23 while the reverse contains 27 or 28; on the seal of Sisinnios the *patrikios* and *strategos* (no. 14), the obverse contains 25 while the reverse contains 27. This type of variation is also found in the rare examples that continue Psalm 139:1 on the reverse: on a different seal of this same Sisinnios (no. 15) that quotes Psalm 139 throughout, the obverse contains 25 characters while the reverse contains 22. Further examples of these phenomena can be seen in the catalogue below. Clearly in conjunction with the first part of Psalm 139:1, a reverse inscription consisting of either (a) the continuation of Psalm 139:1 or (b) the quotation of Psalm 42:1 is of satisfactory length for the circular inscription.

18 I thank Eric McGeer for his assistance in the analysis of the metricality of these psalm verses. For a discussion of non-dodecasyllabic verses on Byzantine seals, see E. McGeer, “Discordant Verses on Byzantine Metrical Seals,” *SBS* 4 (1995): 63–69.

formulas and inscriptions, and on the identification of specific figures—Beser and Sisinnios—who are discussed below.

10 Zacos-Veglery, no. 3046a.

11 All psalm numbers follow those of the Septuagint.

12 I have found no apparent relationship between these psalms other than the generally shared content of their quotations.

13 While this is typically the case, there are instances of one appearing without the other, for example on the seals of Yazîd (Psalm 42: no. 7, Psalm 139: nos. 8–9).

14 The similarity between this petition for deliverance from evil found in the two psalms and that found in the Lord’s Prayer (“ῥύσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ”) should be noted.

Table 1. Psalm quotations on seals.

	Source	Text	Translation	No. of Seal Types
1.	Psalm 26:1	Κύριος φωτισμός μου καὶ σωτήρ μου . . . Κύριος ὑπερασπιστῆς τῆς ζωῆς μου.	The Lord is my light and my savior . . . The Lord is my life's protector.	3
2.	Psalm 139:1 ^a	Ἐξελοῦ με, Κύριε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονηροῦ, ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου ῥύσαι με.	Deliver me, O Lord, from an evil person; from an unjust man save me.	11
3.	Psalm 42:1 Combined quotation from Psalm 42:1 and Psalm 139:1	Ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπου ἀδίκου καὶ δολίου ῥύσαι με. Ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου καὶ δολίου ῥύσαι με.	From an unjust and deceitful person, save me. From an unjust and deceitful man, save me.	9
4.	Psalm 102:4 Apolytikion of the Koimesis Paraphrase from Psalm 102:4 and Apolytikion	Τὸν λυτρούμενον ἐκ φθορᾶς τὴν ζωὴν σου. ... Λυτρομένη ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν Λυτρομένη ἐκ φθορᾶς τὴν ψυχὴν μου	(The Lord) who redeems your life from corruption (The Virgin) redeeming our souls from death (The Virgin) redeeming my soul from corruption	1
5.	Psalm 117:6	Κύριος ἐμοὶ βοηθός, καὶ οὐ φοβηθήσομαι.	The Lord is a helper to me and I will not fear.	3
6.	Psalm 142:9 Paraphrase from Psalm 142:9	Ἐξελοῦ με ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου, Κύριε. Ἐξελοῦ με, Κύριε, ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου.	Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord. Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies.	1

Text is based on A. Rahlfs, *Septuaginta* (1935; repr., Stuttgart, 1979); the translation is modified from A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright, eds., *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (Oxford, 2007).

^a In seven of the types quoting this psalm, it is found in combined quotation with Psalm 42:1, with the first part of Psalm 139:1 on the obverse.

of two different psalms, thus magnifying the common message found within both. Indeed, the mixture of these commonly memorized biblical prayers was not uncommon in Byzantium, as can be seen, for example, in Theodore Synkellos's seventh-century *Homily on the Siege of Constantinople*.¹⁹

The quotation from Psalm 142:9 (Ἐξελοῦ με ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου, Κύριε) is very similar to that from Psalm 139:1, beginning with “ἐξελοῦ με,” “deliver me,” and containing a small corruption that further mirrors

Psalm 139:1. The vocative Κύριε is moved from the end of the verse to the middle. This makes the psalmic quotation into acceptable verse, in this case a typical sigillographic dodecasyllable. Further evidence for this attempted metricality is found on the psalm seal of Theodotos the *hypatos* (no. 18), in which the second part of Psalm 139:1 is modified in a manner different from the common Psalm 139:1–Psalm 42:1 combination: although the fractional nature of the inscription makes it difficult to interpret,²⁰ the ῥύσαι με is moved to the front of the inscription, and a vocative “Κύριε” may be inserted into the middle of the line. This refiguring

19 Theodore mixes parts of psalm verses together in this homily, although it is uncertain if he intended to draw on the multiple associations or if he drew merely upon memorized, rhetorically useful language. See D. Gyllenhaal, “The New Josiah: Heraclian Ideology and the Deuteronomistic History” (MA thesis, Oxford University, 2013), 92–93.

20 I follow Zacos on this, who, I believe, extrapolated the missing parts of the inscription correctly; see the commentary in the catalogue below.

of the psalm's grammar with a vocative Κύριε lengthens the too-short continuation of Psalm 139:1 without combining Psalms 139 and Psalm 42, yet still brings the quotation from Psalm 139 closer to an acceptable meter.²¹ It is clear that there was an attempt to metrize these psalmic inscriptions.

The other psalmic verses that appear on seals communicate the same general meaning as the three verses already discussed, that the seal owner's protector is the Lord, from whom he seeks help. The lines quoted from Psalm 26 and Psalm 117 echo the invocatory sentiment present in the psalms already mentioned: the quotation from Psalm 26:1 labels the Lord as “σωτήρ μου” and “ὑπερασπιστής τῆς ζωῆς μου,” while that from Psalm 117:6 says “Κύριος ἐμοὶ βοηθός.” The quotation from Psalm 117 found on the reverse of the seal is mirrored by a circular inscription on the obverse, which follows the form of the psalm but with a decidedly Christian twist—the insertion of the Λόγος in the place of the psalmic Κύριος.²² The reference to Psalm 102:4 is similarly interesting,²³ as it seems to interweave the text of the psalm, “τὸν λυτρούμενον ἐκ φθορᾶς τὴν ζωὴν σου” with the *apolytikion* sung at the service of the Koimesis,²⁴ “λυτρουμένη ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.” The resultant intertext refers not to the Κύριος, but to the Virgin, who is invoked on the obverse: “Λυτρουμένη ἐκ φθορᾶς τὴν ψυχὴν μου.”²⁵

These seals incorporate the prayers of Hebrew holy men into contemporary Byzantine Christian practice and doctrine, while drawing on the apotropaic content of the psalms quoted. The attempted versification of the psalms served as a kind of modernization of ancient holy prayers. There is a clear unified agenda shared by the various psalmic quotations: the prayers seek divine salvation and protection. These are focused, apotropaic verses, begging the help of the Lord or an intercessor for help and redemption in the face of evil. These verses act as scriptural elaborations of the general invocations commonly found on seals: Θεοτόκε, Κύριε, Χριστέ, and Ἀγία Τριάς βοήθει.²⁶ Thus, these psalmic quotations raise some simple questions. In light of the uniqueness of these sigillographic scriptural quotations, why would these Byzantine officials choose to put psalms on their seals? What specifically did these quotations seek to evoke and accomplish? What can we say about the individuals who used these sigillographic types?

Why Psalms?

The psalms enjoyed a privileged place in Byzantine religion and culture. Psalms were ever present in Byzantine society both in and out of ecclesiastical settings. Psalms were chanted daily in church, where the majority of laypeople grew accustomed to their words.²⁷ Vigils

21 If this reading is correct, then it is still thirteen syllables, not the hoped-for twelve; however, it has been made to sound more like typical Byzantine verse, especially through the likely insertion of the vocative.

22 While the “Logos” inscription is incomplete, its reading is relatively certain until the last word, and clearly mirrors the psalm found on the reverse.

23 Seibt and Zarnitz note this, and also note that the subject of the participle λυτρουμένη is the Virgin invoked on the obverse, as opposed to the Lord, as in the psalm: W. Seibt and M. L. Zarnitz, *Das byzantinische Bleisiegel als Kunstwerk: Katalog zur Ausstellung* (Vienna, 1997), no. 4.2.10.

24 The paraphrase of this important *troparion* in this period can be connected to the growth of Marian feast days like the Dormition within the Orthodox calendar in the 6th–8th centuries, based probably on the popularity of apocryphal texts like the *Protevangelion* of James; M. B. Cunningham, “The Reception of Romanos in Middle Byzantine Homiletics and Hymnography,” *DOP* 62 (2008): 254 n. 9.

25 For an earlier example of refiguring psalms to address the Virgin instead of God, see Theodore Synkellos, *Homily on the Siege of Constantinople* (Gyllenhaal, “New Josiah,” 90–91).

26 Θεοτόκε βοήθει is the most common invocation before the 8th century, although in middle Byzantine seals Κύριε βοήθει became quite common. The invocation Χριστέ βοήθει is not limited to the iconoclastic era, as it first appeared as early as the 6th century (Zacos-Veglery, no. 856) and began to become common in the late 7th century; however, to some extent it can be associated with the iconoclast era, as most are dated to the 8th century (e.g., see the list in Zacos-Veglery [p. 1939] of seals with this invocation). On the other hand, we will see below that Ἀγία Τριάς βοήθει can be treated as an iconoclastic formula.

27 Unlike the rest of the Old Testament, which was heard much more rarely. However, a more complete discussion of the omnipresence of psalmody in liturgical settings is outside the scope of this paper. See D. Krueger, “The Hagiographers’ Bible: Intertextuality and Scriptural Culture in the Late Sixth and the First Half of the Seventh Century,” in *The New Testament in Byzantium*, ed. D. Krueger and R. S. Nelson (Washington, DC, 2016), 177–89. For psalters and psalmody generally, see G. R. Parpulov, *Toward a History of Byzantine Psalters, ca. 850–1350 AD* (Plovdiv, 2014); for the liturgy of the early 8th century, see R. F. Taft, “The Liturgy of the Great Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm,” *DOP* 34–35 (1980–81): 45–75; more generally, see idem, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*

and processions replete with public psalm-singing were late antique norms that continued well into middle Byzantium.²⁸ Reciting psalms, whether of one or two *kathismata* or of the entire Psalter, was an important part of daily monastic ritual both in the hours and in private prayer.²⁹ The recitation of psalms, in full or piecemeal, was also an integral aspect of the private prayer of Byzantine laypersons.³⁰ We are left with a large number of Byzantine psalters, although most come from the ninth century and thereafter, nearly all of which were used privately, outside of liturgical settings.³¹ As songs of prayer attributed to David and other Hebrew holy men, psalmody became the highest form of prayer. As tabulated by Church Fathers like Athanasios of Alexandria, the various psalms were prescribed as prayers for particular situations—such as when one intended to praise, thank, or protect oneself from feeling lust or hopelessness.³² These verses were turned to time after time in the Jewish and Christian worlds, at least in part because they lent scriptural authority to the commonplace supplication to the divine for assistance in the face of all sorts of suffering and vicissitudes. Psalms were ubiquitous in the

Byzantine world, yet absent among Byzantine seals, with the exception of this small group.³³

This exceptional phenomenon can be attributed to the iconoclasts' ardent interest in the Old Testament. Leo III and Constantine V repeatedly looked back to ancient Israel and emphasized the Old Testament in their religio-political propaganda. Building upon imperial propaganda of previous centuries and especially since the reign of Herakleios, Leo III and Constantine V extended the ideas of Byzantium as the New Israel and of the emperor as King David.³⁴ Furthermore, Leo III and Constantine V can likely be connected to the institution of Jewish law, a source of Roman legal precedent, in the form of the *Nomos Mosaikos*, a series of laws based on Jewish laws of the Pentateuch, likely associated with their *Ecloga*.³⁵ According to the iconoclast character Kosmas in Theosebes' *Nouthesia gerontos peri ton hagion eikonon*, Constantine V argued that the whole of the bible ought to be interpreted literally, since the contemporary Christian community represented

(Collegetown, MN, 1993) and R. F. Taft and S. Parenti, *Il Grande Ingresso* (Grottaferrata, 2014).

28 G. Frank, "Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Century," in *Byzantine Christianity*, ed. D. Krueger, (Minneapolis, 2012), 62–63; J. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Crosses* (Washington, DC, 1994), 14–15; J. Baldovin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy* (Rome, 1987), 206–9.

29 G. R. Parpulov, "Psalms and Personal Piety in Byzantium," in *The Old Testament in Byzantium*, ed. P. Magdalino and R. Nelson (Washington, DC, 2010), 79.

30 Ibid., 80. See also D. Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia, 2014), 17–22, for a discussion of the construction of religious identity through the "I"-speech of the Psalms, and thus of one's relationship with God, for both monks and laypersons; M. Mullett, "Food for the Spirit and a Light for the Road: Reading the Bible in the *Life of Cyril Philoteos* by Nicholas Kataskeponos," in *Literacy, Education, and Manuscript Transmission in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. C. Holmes and J. Waring (Leiden, 2002), 139–64.

31 Parpulov, "Psalms," 82.

32 In his *Letter to Marcellinus*, Athanasios discusses the importance of the psalms, their instructional value for prayer, and their encompassment of all sorts of scripture, from the Pentateuch to the Prophets to the Gospel. See D. Krueger, "The Old Testament and Monasticism," in Magdalino and Nelson, *Old Testament*, 217–20.

33 See n. 2 above.

34 M. Auzépy, "Les Isauriens et l'espace sacré: L'église et les reliques," in *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007), 350–51. G. Dagron, *Empereur et prêtre* (Paris, 1996), passim. J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: The Transformation of a Culture* (Cambridge, 1997), 361–62, synthesizes the 6th- and 7th-century background to the idea of Byzantium as the New Israel. See also C. Rapp, "Old Testament Models for Emperors in Early Byzantium," in Magdalino and Nelson, *Old Testament in Byzantium*, 182–97, who discusses the trends of Old Testament metaphor and Davidic imagery in the 4th–7th centuries, culminating in the reign of Heraclius; for the reign of Herakleios, see Gyllenhaal, "New Josiah" (n. 20 above).

35 P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, "Introduction," in eadem, *Old Testament*, 20–22. As Magdalino and Nelson argue, based on its content and manuscript evidence, the *Ecloga* can likely be associated with the *Nomos Mosaikos*, and thus the iconoclast attempt to apply their version of Jewish law in precedence to Roman law. According to them, this attempt persisted until the triumph of icons, and ultimately the Macedonian recodification and reapplication of Roman law. Particularly pointing to early iconoclasm's championing of the second commandment against idolatry, they argue in direct opposition to A. Schminck ("Bermerkungen zum sog. 'Nomos Mosaikos,'" *FM* 11 [2005]: 249–68), who attempted to redate the law to the early Macedonian period, ascribing it to the hand of Photios. Z. Chitwood ("Byzantine Legal Culture under the Macedonian Dynasty, 867–1056" [PhD diss, Princeton, 2012], 185–206) follows Schminck. However, M. T. G. Humphreys, *Law, Power, and Imperial Ideology in the Iconoclast Era: c. 680–850* (Oxford, 2015), 171–79, convincingly refuted the arguments of Schminck, associating the *Nomos Mosaikos* with the *Ecloga* and other appending law texts (e.g., the *Nomos Rhodion Nautikos* and *Nomos Georgikos*), and thus, the legal ideas of Leo III and Constantine V.

a continuation of the Israelite community.³⁶ And of course, the early iconoclasts famously championed the second commandment's prohibition against idolatry.³⁷ This focus on the Old Testament should be understood not as a turning away from the New Testament, but as a refocusing of emphasis.³⁸ As the prayers of David, Moses, and other such figures, the psalms symbolized the continuity from Israel to Byzantium in their unquestioned importance in Christian prayer and ritual. Through the quotations of various psalms, these seal owners showcased their personal piety and their firm connections to the words of the Old Testament, thus emphasizing the cohesion between the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Moreover, the scriptural quotations served as iconography.³⁹ During the second iconoclast period,

John the Grammarian articulated an iconoclast explanation of this idea: that words can serve the purpose of representation definitively, while images distort by depicting only appearances.⁴⁰ Based on this sort of reasoning, a quotation from divinely inspired scripture could serve the purpose of an image—and indeed, more effectively and appropriately. In this framework, words were the intermediary between men and God, whether scripture, hymns, or prayers.⁴¹ As sung scriptural prayers, psalms fulfilled all three of these categories, and linked the physical seals aurally to a liturgical context through their association with chant.⁴² The quotation of psalm verses expanded the traditional inscriptional repertoire of Byzantine seals, while remaining within the normal semantic sphere of prayer for divine assistance.

As iconography, these psalm inscriptions fit the wider eighth-century imperial iconoclast practice of using words in the place of images in both seals and coins. Leo III introduced the *miliaresion*, an aniconic silver coin, in 720 at the accession of Constantine V as coemperor.⁴³ These coins contained, instead of any depiction of the emperor, a cross on three steps on the obverse with “Ιησους Χριστος νικα” encircling it.⁴⁴ The most proximate inspiration for the particular iconography of these coins is the iconography of some of Leo and Constantine's seals, which are aniconic in the same

36 A. N. Mitsides, *Η παρουσία της Εκκλησίας Κύπρου εις τον Αγώνα υπέρ των εικόνων* (Leukosia, 1989), 161, lines 220–21, discussed by C. Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm* (Princeton, 2002), 58–59. Barber discusses this text (in Mitsides, *Η παρουσία*, 153–92), which includes the iconoclast Kosmas's argument for continuity from the law of Moses to the present day. In the apparently pseudonymous correspondence between Leo III and the Caliph 'Umar II, likely written by an iconoclast of the late 8th century (Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* [n. 1 above], 115, n. 143), or by a Levantine Melkite monk in the mid-8th century (C. Palombo, “The ‘Correspondence’ of Leo III and ‘Umar II: Traces of an Early Christian Arabic Apologetic Work,” *Millenium* 12, no. 1 [2015]: 231–64), or perhaps even later (G. S. Reynolds, *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu: 'Abd Al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins* [Leiden, 2004], 147), Leo continuously quotes the Old Testament and appeals to ancient Israel as a prescriptive norm in his dialogue with 'Umar; see A. Jeffrey, “Ghevond's Text of the Correspondence between 'Umar II and Leo III,” *HTR* 37, no. 4 (October 1944): 269–332.

37 This is a definitive feature of early iconoclasm, that the worship of icons enabled human error: M. Auzépy, “Les enjeux de l'iconoclasme,” in *L'histoire des iconoclastes* (Paris, 2007), 270–72. See also idem, “La signification religieuse de l'aniconisme byzantine,” in *L'aniconisme dans l'art religieux byzantine (Actes du colloque de Genève 1–3 octobre 2009)*, ed. M. Campagnolo, P. Magdalino, et al. (Geneva, 2014), 33–34. It was only in Constantine V's reign, in conjunction with the Council of Hieria (754) that Christological arguments for iconoclasm—e.g., that Christ cannot be circumscribed (Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 78, 117–18)—displaced accusations of idolatry as the predominant justification for iconoclasm; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 137.

38 Humphreys, *Law, Power and Imperial Ideology*, 104–5 discusses the evidence of this refocus even within the *prooimion* of the *Elogia*.

39 In a later period, for similar individualizing purposes, biblical scenes were often placed on seals, particularly of the New Testament

scenes corresponding to the great feasts of the Byzantine church; see J. Cotsonis, “Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals (Sixth–Twelfth Centuries): Frequency, Iconography, and Clientele,” *Gesta* 48, no. 1 (2009): 55–86; see also the Dumbarton Oaks online exhibition, “Leadens Gospels,” (2013), <http://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/leadens-gospels> (accessed 10 November 2016).

40 Barber, *Figure and Likeness*, 125–27, who discusses and translates the passage published in J. Gouillard, “Fragments inédits d'un antirrhétique de Jean le Grammairien,” *REB* 24 (1966): 173–74.

41 Auzépy, “Les enjeux de l'iconoclasme,” 281. In Auzépy's discussion of the Isaurian religious focus on words, she actually mentions these psalm seals as evidence, citing Zacos.

42 B. V. Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *ArtB* 88, no. 4 (2006): 648, discusses the multisensory phenomenality of psalms within the Byzantine cultural sphere.

43 *DOC* 3.1:62–64, 226–27, 231–32, nos. 21–23. See also Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (n. 1 above), 121.

44 Ibid. The use of Latin characters to write Greek words in this manner persisted on Byzantine gold coins until the rule of Romanos IV Diogenes, as Eudokia is the last to place “Jesus Christ, king of kings” in Latin on her coins during her sole reign before her marriage to Romanos, *DOC* 3.2: “Eudocia,” 1.1–6. On seals, Greek–Latin transliteration occurred until the reign of Isaac Komnenos; see *DOSeals* 6: nos. 75–76.

style but with different inscriptions. The seals of the Isaurians showcased the emperors' piety and power sanctioned by the Holy Trinity.⁴⁵ Each seal's obverse contains the words "en onomati tu Patros [καὶ] tu Yiou [καὶ] tu Agiu Pneumatou,"⁴⁶ i.e., "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," with the names of the emperors, said to be "pistoī Basilis Romaion," i.e., "faithful emperors of the Romans."⁴⁷ Yet moreover, *miliaresia*—and indeed imperial seals—were modeled after aniconic Islamic coinage, specifically the silver *dirham*, both in style and in module.⁴⁸ Moreover, as a notable antecedent to these psalm seals, *dirhams* contained Qur'anic quotations in their circular inscriptions.⁴⁹ The emerging Umayyad paradigm of textual iconography should be considered as a potential model for these psalm seals.⁵⁰

The iconographic innovations on the *miliaresion* and the imperial seal indicate a clearly anti-iconic statement on behalf of Leo III, and the particular invocation of the Trinity on his seal calls upon it as divine assurance of his word bound in this seal.⁵¹ Moreover

this Trinitarian formula, itself originally taken from scripture,⁵² is echoed in non-imperial iconoclast seals in the form of various invocations to the Holy Trinity found on seals of the eighth century; on these seals, "Holy Trinity" replaces the typical vocative Theotokos or Lord, saying, for example, "Ἁγία Τριάς βοήθει."⁵³ Like the psalm seals, the seals containing these invocations clearly come from individuals associated with the iconoclast movement, based on their appearance only in the eighth century and their connection to the Trinitarian emphasis on the imperial seals of Leo III. These seals seem to represent the same class of people who used psalm seals; indeed nearly all the seals containing these invocations represent lay individuals in the Byzantine hierarchy, similar to the owners of psalm seals;⁵⁴ many of them were powerful secular individuals such as *patrikioi*, *strategoi*, and *hypatoi*.⁵⁵ There is even some overlap between these invocations to the Trinity and the appearance of psalms on eighth-century seals: the seals of Moschos (no. 11), Theodosios the hypatos (nos. 16 and 17), and Theodotos the hypatos (no. 18). Another psalm seal owner, Epiphanius, *patrikios* and *strategos* (no. 5), can be further connected to iconoclast sigillographic style; this Epiphanius likely possessed another seal which contained a crosslet with "Ἰησοῦ

45 For further discussion of the early iconoclast focus on the Trinity and its connection to a focus on the Eucharist, see Auzépy, "La signification religieuse de l'aniconisme byzantine" (n. 37 above), *passim*, esp. 10–13.

46 The Greek inscription is written out in Latin characters.

47 *DOSeals* 6: no. 31.1–2. This becomes a typical form for iconoclast imperial seals, *DOSeals* 6: no. 32–34, 42, 44, 46–47.

48 P. Grierson (*DOC* 3.1:62) gives both Byzantine seals and Umayyad *dirhams* as sources of inspiration for the *miliaresia*. As evidence that the *miliaresion* is modeled after the *dirham*, Grierson lists their shared modules, thin flans, triple dotted borders, and general epigraphic appearance—including circular and linear inscriptions.

49 For Umayyad coinage, see J. Walker, *A Catalogue of Muhammadan Coins in the British Museum*, vol. 2, *A Catalogue of the Arab-Byzantine and Post-Reform Umayyad Coins* (London, 1956); for a more updated but less comprehensive treatment of the topic, see *Sylloge of Islamic Coins in the Ashmolean*, vol. 2, *Early Post-Reform Coinage* (Oxford, 2009).

50 On the textual iconographic tradition in Islam, a useful point of comparison for Byzantine aniconism, see most recently I. C. Schick, "The Content of Form: Islamic Calligraphy between Text and Representation," in *Sign and Design: Script as Image in Cross-Cultural Perspective (300–1600 CE)*, ed. B. M. Bedos-Rezak and J. F. Hamburger (Washington, DC, 2016), 173–94.

51 On later metrical seals it is not uncommon to explicitly request the one whose icon appears on the obverse, whether a saint (e.g., *DOSeals* 2: nos. 34.3, 17.1) or the Virgin (e.g., *DOSeals* 2: no. 52.3), to affirm a seal and the words it seals, or indeed to label the seal itself as a confirmer of the seal owner's words, with verses often beginning

Γραφὰς σφραγίζω; e.g., *DOSeals* 3: no. 33.1, 22.3. For a discussion of metrical seal types, see Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus* (n. 2 above), 31–60.

52 Matthew 28:19.

53 Forms of Ἁγία Τριάς βοήθει are found on the seals of over 30 individuals in Zacos-Veglery alone; see the index, pp. 1937–39 for a full listing. The most common variations are Ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, βοήθει, and Ἁγία Τριάς βοήθει. Other variations occur, with some even asking for the intercession of the Theotokos with the help of the Trinity: Ἁγία Τριάς Ὁ Θεὸς βοήθει; Ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, πρεσβείας τῆς Θεοτόκου, βοήθει; Ἁγία Τριάς φύλαττε; Ἁγία Τριάς διὰ παντὸς φύλαττε; Παναγία Τριάς βοήθει; Παναγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν; and Διὰ τῶν πρεσβειῶν τῆς Θεοτόκου, Ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, βοήθει.

54 This phenomenon among psalm seal owners will be discussed further below.

55 Of the approximately 34 individuals (approximate because it is unclear in some instances whether two seal types belong to the same owner) whose seals contain an invocation in this manner, six are *patrikioi*, six are *strategoi*, and eight are *hypatoi*. Additionally there is one *parakoimomenos*. There are two—maybe three—ecclesiastics among this group: a bishop of Ephesos (Zacos-Veglery, no. 2467), a metropolitan of Myra (Zacos-Veglery, no. 1657), and an individual who may be bishop of Hyneon (?) (Zacos-Veglery, no. 926). The rest are other lay officials: five imperial *spatharioi*, two *ek prosopou*, a *char-toularios*, a *koubikoularios*, etc.

Χριστὲ νικᾷς” in the angles on the obverse,⁵⁶ a clear reference to Leo III’s *miliaresion*.⁵⁷ It cannot be doubted that these psalm seals represent part of a trend among iconoclastic individuals including—though not necessarily inspired by—the emperor Leo III. Through these invocations and quotations, a number of eighth-century lay officials identified and promoted their piety, using religious inscriptions as iconography on their seals.

Yet the eighth-century sigillographic trend of “textual iconography” extended beyond these psalm seals. While figural icons were somewhat common on the obverse of seals in the seventh century, inscriptions or cruciform monograms with additional epigraphy became the norm in the iconoclast era. At the same time, a separate—yet intimately related—textual iconographic trend began to appear on seals: the aforementioned metrical inscriptions.⁵⁸ Two early examples of metrical seals—either slightly before or roughly contemporary to our psalm seals—belonging to Basil the *hypatos*⁵⁹ and the hymnographer Andrew metropolitan of Crete (fig. 1) illustrate the connection between this textual sigillographic innovation and that of the psalm seals. The seal of Basil contains an elaborate invocation to the Holy Trinity in two dodecasyllables in a linear inscription on the obverse and reverse, figured into meter in the same manner in which psalms were; it reads, “Τριάς Ἁγία διὰ παντὸς φύλαττε / τὸν σὸν

οἰκέτην Βασιλείον ὑπάτον.” Thus while asserting his piety through an invocation to the Trinity, Basil further individualized his seal with a poem, and indeed, “decorated” it with verse in place of figural iconography. The seal of Andrew of Crete—despite belonging to an eighth-century iconophile,⁶⁰ as is evident from its icon of St. Titos—uses the same basic eighth-century sigillographic repertoire as our psalm seals, including the pairing of monograms with circular inscriptions, as seen on the reverse. And as in the metricized version of Psalm 142, the vocative “Χριστὲ” is placed in the middle of the dodecasyllable. While this metrical inscription is rare for both its date and its circular arrangement, its content is typical of later seal epigrams: it replaces a prosaic identifying inscription by supplying the expected information about the seal owner, as do the dodecasyllables on the seal of Basil the *hypatos*. Thus, unlike the metrical poems that start in this period and unlike, indeed, the Trinitarian invocations, the psalm quotations are distinct from the main inscription of the seal, and do not serve to identify their seal owners. The psalms are secondary, perhaps echoing the invocation, but both physically and grammatically distinct from the main inscription. Thus, they fit more accurately into the register of iconography, the presence of which does not need to have any bearing on the identifying inscriptions found on seals. Indeed, the only similar sort of secondary inscriptions found on seals are iconographic labels or sigla.



Fig. 1 Seal of Andrew metropolitan of Crete, BZS.1958.106.5521 (courtesy Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection)

Just as Andrew could choose for his ecclesiastical seal a depiction of St. Titos, the patron saint of Crete, so also the owners of our seals picked particular psalms for

56 I tentatively agree with the proposal of Zacos and Vegliery (no. 2990) to identify him as our psalm seal owner, and likely also as the owner of a seal with the same name and titles and the invocation Χριστὲ βοήθει (no. 3103). G. Schlumberger published a fourth seal that is perhaps attributable to this same individual with an invocative monogram to the Theotokos (*Sigillographie de l'Empire byzantine* [1884], 364, no. 3). It would be strange but not unprecedented for a single individual to use four different seal types (e.g., Yazid, discussed below). While it is possible that there is more than one individual represented by these seals, the high rank and office Epiphanius holds makes a single individual entirely likely.

57 The cross and this phrase, associated with Constantine’s victory at the Milvian bridge, became strongly associated with iconoclasm, for example, through the apotropaic inscription put on the walls of Constantinople ca. 740 at the beginning of the reign of Constantine V; see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 161. See also L. Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge, 1999), 152–59.

58 Despite their origin in this period, metrical inscriptions did not become common until much later, in the late 11th and 12th centuries (Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus*, 33–34).

59 Zacos-Vegliery, no. 759A.

60 This seal may predate iconoclasm, as Andrew was metropolitan of Crete 710/11–740 (*DOSeals* 2: no. 36.8).

their seals. The clearest example of this phenomenon is Yazīd, who employs three different psalms in his various seal types. On his seals, we find quotations from Psalm 139 (no. 8), Psalm 42 (nos. 7, 9–10), and Psalm 142 (no. 6) at three different stages of his career. In a further innovation, Yazīd uses the psalm seal type on only the obverse of his seals. These obverses contain a cruciform invocative monogram in the center with an inscription in its angles and a psalm around the outside. On the reverse, he finishes the main inscription of the seal in a linear inscription. The seals of Yazīd prove that this briefly popular innovation of placing psalm verses on seals was not static; individuals chose specific psalms for their seals and varied the expected types. Another peculiar psalm seal is attributed to Demetrios the eparch (no. 4). In the place of a cruciform monogram, the obverse of this seal contains a complex⁶¹ block monogram specifying the seal owner's name and title,⁶² clearly an archaizing touch in the eighth century since block monograms had become quite rare by the mid-seventh century.⁶³ While certain sigillographic conventions persisted for centuries, seal types constantly changed through individual innovation.

Moreover, whether through prayers or icons, sigillographic iconography gave religious validity to the seal. Such religious insignia emphasized the seal's primary function, to protect and validate a document's authenticity—easily forgotten when viewing seals in modern collections divorced from context. In a trope commonly found in later metrical inscriptions, the inscription actually spells out this purpose, saying in the name of the seal:⁶⁴ “I seal the writings of” the seal

owner.⁶⁵ Some later judicial seals extend this trope, saying that they confirm and protect the enclosed judicial opinions.⁶⁶ And indeed, the saint depicted in the obverse icon is occasionally invoked in these inscriptions, to assert the saint's protection over the seal and the document that it seals.⁶⁷ Thus, it is important to view these psalmic quotations not in the context of the “religionization” or “sanctification” of the seals upon which they were inscribed, for that would be to misunderstand the very nature of Byzantine sealing practice. This sigillographic innovation used the most fundamental prayers of Byzantine Christianity to further the divine validity of a seal in the same way that a depiction of—and prayer to—a saint would. At the same time, it provided a means through which seal owners could exhibit their particular sort of religious zeal and their affiliation with a group of powerful officials in the second quarter of the eighth century.

Psalms in Material Culture

Although psalmic quotation on seals was an innovation in eighth-century Byzantium, psalmic epigraphy

and in these cases, seem to serve as elaborations of the invocations, which definitively seek help for the seal owner. Nevertheless, both should be considered, and indeed, both were likely meant to some degree. For much more in depth investigations into the Byzantine epistemology of objects, see G. Peers, ed., *Byzantine Things in the World* (Houston and New Haven, 2013); for an exploration into the epistemological relationship between specifically seal owner and seal (in a high medieval Western context), see B. M. Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego Was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston, 2013), esp. 55–71.

65 I.e. “Γραφὰς σφραγίζω,” e.g., V. Laurent, *Le Corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, vol. 5, *L'Église*, 2: nos. 1360, 1082, *DOSeals* 3: no. 22.3.

66 E.g., *DOSeals* 3: no. 2.23 (11th century): “I confirm and ratify the actions and judgments of Niketas, judge of the Thrakesioi” (“Υἱφους βεβαιῶ καὶ κυρῶ καὶ τοὺς λόγους δικασπόλου Νικήτα τῶν Θρακησίων”); *DOSeals* 4: no. 55.5 (10th/11th century): “I approve and watch over the wills and words of Niketas, judge of Mesopotamia” (“Βουλὰς βεβαιῶ Νικήτα καὶ τοὺς λόγους τηρῶ δικαστοῦ τῆς Μεσοποταμίας”).

67 E.g., *DOSeals* 2: no. 17.1: “May you seal over the letters of Basil, the archipoimen of Larissa, blessed one [i.e. St. Achillios, depicted on the obverse]” (“Επισφραγίζεις τὰς γραφὰς Βασιλείου τοῦ τῆς Λαρίσσης ἀρχιποίμενος μάκαρ”); *DOSeals* 2: no. 52.3: “The Mother of God [depicted on the obverse] seals also the letters of the seal impression of Theodore Makrembolites, (metropolitan) of Methymna” (“Μήτηρ Θεοῦ σφράγιζε καὶ γραφὰς τύπου Μακρεμβολίτου Μεθύμνης Θεοδώρου”).

61 A “complex” monogram contains more than one piece of information (e.g., name and title, title and office).

62 The reading of this block monogram is uncertain; see the commentary in the catalogue below (no. 4).

63 Oikonomides, *Dated Seals* (n. 2 above), 152–53.

64 In light of the first-person reference to the seal present in these later metrical inscriptions, it is also important to consider the first person evoked in the much earlier psalm inscriptions. The most obvious reading is of course that the individual who begs deliverance is the psalm seal owner, but these metrical seals in which the seals “speak” show that the seal could also be referred to in the first person in metrical contexts. Indeed, in light of the role of seals as physical manifestations of the validity of a document—and the use of religious iconography as an apotropaic safeguard—this alternative reading is tempting. Both the seal and seal owner require protection. Yet while it is ambiguous, the seal owner is the more likely referent, as the psalms were such typically utilized prayers of individual protection,

was not. In late antique Greek public inscriptions in religious and secular settings, the Psalter was the most quoted book of the bible by a significant margin.⁶⁸ Through the seventh century, the Psalms were commonly quoted as prayers of protection. Psalm 117:20 and 120:8,⁶⁹ both of which beg divine protection for entering and exiting, and Psalm 45:1, seeking divine protection from natural disasters, were placed over doorways.⁷⁰ The placement of psalmic quotations in churches was a notable aspect of the church decoration of the early iconoclasts, for example in the Church of the Dormition in Nicaea and St. Eirene in Constantinople.⁷¹ Psalm inscriptions such as Psalm 117:20 and 131:15–16 are commonly found over doorways in middle Byzantine marble templon screens, and, in an apparent paraphrase of the ἐξελοῦ με motif, cut into epigrammatic form on a tenth-century templon architrave in the Peloponnesos.⁷² Psalms were additionally common in funerary inscriptions.⁷³

Psalms also occurred on small personal objects, which of course, bear more immediate relevance to seals. Similar to lintel inscriptions in their quotation of psalms⁷⁴ and indeed similar to seals in their shape, size, and invocative inscriptions are the so-called magical amulets of the late antique east, which provide a possible antecedent to the psalm seals. Christian amulets are well attested throughout the late antique world, as we know from archaeological evidence and the constant rebukes of Church Fathers.⁷⁵ The practice of using psalms on apotropaic amulets was common in late antique

Levantine Judaism. Such inscriptions were often written out in bilingual or even trilingual form in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.⁷⁶ These amulets continued to be produced after the Islamic conquests—significantly less so in the Levant, but with a new fervor in the territory of the Eastern Roman Empire up through Byzantium's last centuries.⁷⁷ Yet amulets with psalmic inscriptions were not limited to Judaism. Most late antique Egyptian amulets written on papyri that quote scripture do so from the Psalms.⁷⁸ Magical or medical amulets of these sorts were common throughout the eastern Mediterranean late antique world.⁷⁹ And from the sixth and seventh centuries in Syria and Palestine, we have a number of quite seal-like double-sided oblong bronze amulets featuring a variety of Christian-magical symbolism, including a rider identified as either Solomon or St. Sisinnios,⁸⁰ obscure magic words and phrases, and the beginning of Psalm 90: “ὁ κατοικῶν ἐν βοθηθείᾳ τοῦ Ὑψίστου.”⁸¹ Some

68 A. E. Felle, “Esporre la Scrittura. L'uso di testi biblici in epigrafi d'ambito pubblico fra Tarda Antichità e prima età bizantina (secoli IV–VIII),” *Antiquité Tardive* 15 (2015): 359; D. Feissel, “La bible dans les inscriptions grecques,” in *Le monde grec ancien et la Bible*, ed. C. Mondésert (Paris, 1984), 229.

69 Felle, “Esporre la Scrittura,” 359–65.

70 Ibid., 366.

71 Auzépy, “La signification religieuse” (n. 38 above), *passim*.

72 G. Pallis, “Inscription on Middle Byzantine Marble Templon Screens,” *BZ* 106, no. 2 (2013): nos. 7, 36, appendix 2c.

73 Feissel, “La bible,” 228–29.

74 W. K. Prentice, “Magical Formulae on Lintels of the Christian Period in Syria,” *AJA* 10, no. 2 (1906): 141–45.

75 See *Byzantine Magic*, ed. H. Maguire (Washington, DC, 1995), particularly the contributions by M. W. Dickie (“The Father of the Church and the Evil Eye”), H. Maguire (“Magic and the Christian Image”), and J. Russell (“The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period”).

76 G. Bohak, “Greek-Hebrew Linguistic Contacts in Late Antique and Medieval Magical Texts,” in *The Jewish-Greek Tradition in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire*, ed. J. K. Aitken and J. C. Paget (New York, 2014). For a much earlier—though probably unrelated—case of this practice from the first-temple period, see J. Smoak, “May YHWH Bless You and Keep You from Evil: The Rhetorical Argument of Ketef Hinnom Amulet I and the Form of the Prayers for Deliverance in the Psalms,” *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 12 (2012): 202–36.

77 Bohak, “Greek-Hebrew Linguistic Contacts,” 253–59.

78 D. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA, 2006), 84–86; see also J. Sanzo, “In the Beginnings—The Apotropaic Use of Scriptural Incipits in Late Antique Egypt” (PhD diss., UCLA, 2012).

79 For a sense of the scope, see G. Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic in Early Byzantium,” *DOP* 38 (1984): 65–86.

80 In the Jewish amuletic tradition, Solomon was depicted as a holy rider slaying a demon and was prayed to for protection because of his associations with apotropaic magic. However, in the Greek Christian amuletic tradition, depictions of a mounted St. Sisinnios gradually replaced Solomon, while using the same general iconographic type. See J. Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets and Their Tradition,” *JWarb* 56 (1993): 33–38.

81 For discussion of these various amulet types, their dating, their function, and the quotation of Psalm 90, see C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, Chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor, 1950), 211–19; Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic,” and Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets.” In an attempt to firmly connect these amulets to the later Russian amuletic tradition, Spier favors a later date—middle Byzantine and beyond—than most scholars prefer for most of these amulets, but he discusses what he deems to be the related late antique amulet tradition—and particular Levantine types—in an appendix (60–62).

round pendants that formed parts of Syrian bronze bracelets additionally contained this Psalm verse,⁸² as did rings.⁸³ These amulets, like our seals, seek help and protection from the divine for their owners. The quotation of these psalms serve an apotropaic purpose.⁸⁴

Stylistically, we see further similarities. The seal of a certain Sisinnios that corresponds with the style and time period of our specimens and that may represent the Sisinnios *patrikios* and *strategos* referred to above contains a unique “curved cruciform” monogram (fig. 2) that recalls the iconography of these Chnoubis-Medusa heads, found on the amulets (fig. 3).⁸⁵ It is unlikely that these seals were directly modeled after these apotropaic amulets. Nevertheless, as common objects similar to seals, both as physical specimens and as protective devices, it is quite plausible that the amulets influenced and anteceded the use of psalms on these seals.⁸⁶ Just as Henry Maguire illustrated how coins could serve as amulets while simultaneously functioning as currency,⁸⁷ these seals filled multiple roles for their owners, as authentications of their word, as apotropaic

devices for their personal protection, and of course as protectors of what they sealed.



Fig. 2 Seal of Sisinnios, private collection (photo courtesy Werner Seibt)



Fig. 3 Silver amulet with Medusa iconography, The Menil Collection, Houston, no. 490.824 (photo courtesy The Menil Collection)

82 E.g., Bonner, *Magical Amulets*, nos. 321, 322; Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic,” no. 10.

83 E.g., Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets,” no. 47. Particularly relevant are the marriage rings mentioned by G. Vikan, “Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium,” *DOP* 44 (1990): 152–58, whose inscriptions quoting Psalm 5:12 clearly invoke the apotropaic amuletic tradition.

84 Vikan (ibid., 161–63) emphasizes the particular apotropaic quality of the psalmic quotation on the amulets.

85 Seal of Sisinnios: W. Seibt and M. L. Zarnitz, *Das byzantinische Bleisiegel als Kunstwerk: Katalog zur Ausstellung* (Vienna, 1997), 4.2.7. Amulet: J. Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets,” no. 34. The amulet dates to a slightly later period—perhaps the 9th (Vikan, “Art, Medicine, and Magic,” 78), or more toward the 10th or 11th century (Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets,” 31–33). For another example of this iconographic type, which also appears in association with Psalm 90, see a silver ring of the same period (Spier, no. 47).

86 A further interesting connection in this respect is the presence of the cross, itself an apotropaic device, in the monograms on these seals. In his discussion of apotropaic amulets, Chrysostom deemed all not wholly Christian imagery inappropriate, and pointed to the cross as the only necessary protection against evil; H. Maguire, “Magic and the Christian Image,” in Maguire, *Byzantine Magic*, 61.

87 H. Maguire, “Magic and Money in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Approaches to Early-Medieval Art*, edited by L. Nees and A. Cutler (Cambridge, MA, 1998). On coins punctured with holes to be used as both jewelry and amulets, see 82–84. It is interesting to note that a number of seals in the Dumbarton Oaks collection (e.g., BZS.1955.1.2825, BZS.1958.106.5363, and BZS.1951.315.101) contain puncture holes, perhaps for a similar purpose.

Psalm Seal Owners: Three Case Studies

The connection between psalm seals and these amulets is increased by their similar association with the Levant. At least two of the individuals who placed psalms on their seals, the aforementioned Yazid and Bashīr, were Arabic speakers. The case of a third possibly non-Greek psalm seal owner, “Azdras,” is too problematic to group with these two better-attested individuals.⁸⁸

88 Zacos-Veglery grouped Azdras with Yazid and Beser as part of a pattern of “Semitic names” on these psalm seals (no. 579). This is not a satisfactory explanation. Azdras is an alternative spelling of “Εσδρας, the Greek name for Ezra (Hebrew עזרא). I am hesitant to associate this supposed Azdras with Yazid and Beser as first of all the reading of the name-monogram is extremely uncertain; it has been accepted by a number of scholars in lieu of any other possibility, but still would be unique both as a monogram and as a name. Even if this reading of the monogram were secure, it would be rash to consider it part of a pattern of “Semitic names.” Bashīr and Yazid are both Arabic names, whose linguistic background is not in much doubt. We have no indication as to what ethnicity this Azdras was. As Esdras is a Hellenized biblical name, then it is quite likely that Azdras is not Arab, as the normal Arabic Christian form of Ezra is عزرا (‘Azrā), following both the Hebrew and the Syriac, and the Islamic version is عزير (‘Uzayr). While the Greek form of the name

Table 2. Yazīd seal types.

Titles/Offices	Circular Inscription
1. Imperial Spatharios and Tourmarch	Psalm 42
2. Imperial Spatharios and Droungarios	Psalm 42
3. Imperial Spatharios and Komes of the Imperial Stables	Psalm 139
4. Hypatos and Imperial Spatharios	Psalm 142
5. Hypatos and Imperial Spatharios	Psalm 42
6. Hypatos	Arabic inscription

We know Yazīd, whose name is spelled in a variety of ways on his seals in Greek,⁸⁹ only from sigillographic evidence, but because of the wealth of seals that survive and the uniqueness of his name for a Byzantine official, his career is easy to trace. There are six seal types that can be associated with this Yazīd from different stages in his career (table 2). By what we assume to be the end of his career, he held the rank of *hypatos*, near the top of the court hierarchy in the early eighth century.⁹⁰ But for the purposes of this paper, his origins are of far more interest. Yazīd was an Arabic speaker, and thus, likely either a migrant to the empire (and to Constantinople) or a convert. Even at the apex of his career, Yazīd issued

does not rule out a Levantine with this name, it provides no evidence as to where this individual might have come from. This Azdras might have been a Jew, a Christian, or perhaps even a member of a Judaizing Christian group. It is abundantly unclear. Based on the uncertainty of the monogram, the lack of prosopographical comparanda, and the potential problem in associating Judaism and Islam together with Byzantine iconoclasm, it is preferable to accept that his identification cannot be satisfactorily determined.

⁸⁹ Zacos points this out in his entry for no. 1984; the name is spelled Ἰεζίδ (no. 7, no. 9), Ἰεζίδ (no. 6a–b), Ἰζίδ (no. 8), Ἰσζίδ (no. 6c–e). Throughout this article, I will be using his Arabic name, Yazīd, as attested on his Arabic seal (fig. 4). In the catalogue below, he can be found under Iezid, the Greek version closest to the Arabic.

⁹⁰ Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* (n. 1 above), 593, order the titles thus: *hypatos, apo hypaton patrikios, apo hypaton, patrikios, protospatharios, spatharios, stratelates, skribon, balnitor, apo eparchon, kandidatos, silentiarios*. However, throughout they acknowledge that the relationships between the titles are somewhat fluid in this period; it is unclear for example, if *patrikios* is hierarchically higher than *hypatos* at this time.

private seals with writing in both Greek and Arabic, as can be seen on a seal of his found in the Münzkabinett in Jena (fig. 4).⁹¹ This specimen is unique in the published sigillographic record as an eighth-century bilingual Greco-Arabic seal. Noticeably on this seal, an Arabic Christian invocation is set in a circular inscription, the location in which we find psalms on his other seals. The connection between this Arabic seal and the psalmic seals of Yazīd are reinforced in a number of his psalm seals that contain a retrograde circular inscription (no. 6c–f), perhaps a mistake that can be associated with the orthography of his native Arabic script or that of his engraver, who may have also carved his Arabic seal. Although a high Constantinopolitan official and head of the imperial stables, so clearly somewhat close to the emperor, he still had dealings in bilingual Greco-Arabic settings, in which he deemed it prudent to put Arabic on his seal. Based on the dating of his seals in the first quarter century of iconoclasm, Yazīd seems to represent an Arab courtier and official of Leo III or perhaps Constantine V, whose Arabic background was likely useful for his official duties.



Fig. 4 Seal of Yazīd with Arabic inscription, Das Großherzogliche orientalische Münzkabinett in Jena, inv. no. 311–B7 (photo courtesy Stefan Heidemann)

Yet Yazīd is not the only eminent Arab official who places psalms on his seals. A figure infamous to later iconophiles, Beser, probably known as Bashīr in Arabic, did so as well. In addition to his seal (no. 2), we know of Beser from a variety of textual sources. In a famous passage from the chronicle of Theophanes, Beser is linked with Leo III's imposition of iconoclasm, in the wake of the Caliph Yazīd II's attempt

⁹¹ S. Heidemann and C. Sode, "Christlich-orientalische Bleisiegel im orientalischen Münzkabinett Jena," *Aram* 11–12 (1999–2000): no. 1.

to implement a sort of iconoclasm in the Umayyad Caliphate in 722/23:

Μεταλαβὼν δὲ ταύτης τῆς πικρᾶς καὶ ἀθεμίτου κακοδοξίας Λέων ὁ βασιλεὺς πολλῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν αἴτιος γέγονεν. Εὐρὼν δὲ ὁμόφρονα τῆς ἀπαιδευσίας ταύτης Βησῆρ τινα τοῦνομα, γενόμενον μὲν ἀπὸ Χριστιανῶν αἰχμάλωτον ἐν Συρία, ἀποστάντα δὲ τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως, καὶ ποιωθέντα τοῖς Ἀράβων δόγμασιν, οὐ πρὸ πολλοῦ δὲ χρόνου ἀπελευθερωθέντα τῆς ἐκείνων δουλείας, καὶ καταλαβόντα τὴν Ῥωμαίων πολιτείαν· διὰ ῥώμην δὲ σώματος καὶ ὁμόνοιαν τῆς κακοδοξίας ἐτιμήθη παρὰ τοῦ αὐτοῦ Λέοντος· ὅστις καὶ συνασπιστὴς τοῦ μεγάλου κακοῦ τούτου γέγονε τῷ βασιλεῖ.

The emperor Leo partook of the same error [i.e., the destruction of icons], a grievous and illicit one, and so became responsible for inflicting many evils upon us. He found a partner in this boorishness—a man called Beser, a former Christian who had been taken captive in Syria, who had abjured the Christian faith and become imbued with Arab doctrines and who, not long before, had been freed from their servitude and returned to the Roman state. Because of his physical strength and like-mindedness in “error” he was honoured by the same Leo. This man, then, became the emperor’s ally with regard to this evil.⁹²

Theophanes directly links Beser with Leo’s imposition of iconoclasm in his entry on 725/26,⁹³ and because of Leo’s supposed connection to Islamic iconoclasm through Beser, he calls both Leo and Beser *σαρακηγόφρων*, or “Saracen-minded.” According to Theophanes and the patriarch Nikephoros, Beser was then killed by the men of the usurper Artabasdos while on embassy to him on behalf of Constantine V.⁹⁴ Beser is attested in other Christian sources as a “renegade”

and an unwavering ally of Leo III’s iconoclast policy.⁹⁵ Two West Syriac chronicles, that of Michael the Syrian and the anonymous *Chronicle of 1234*, record a certain Bashīr—who may or may not be identifiable with the Byzantine court official—as a captured Byzantine prisoner who pretended before the Caliph Hishām b. ‘Abd al-Malik (724–743) to be the son of Justinian II, Tiberios. The Syriac chroniclers characterize this Bashīr as a heathen, who enters the sanctuary of churches in Edessa and elsewhere and blasphemously grabs the host with his hand, in the manner of a Byzantine emperor.⁹⁶ Whether or not this story is true, or whether it can be connected to our Beser, it is clear that the Syriac tradition retained a memory of a Bashīr in the early iconoclast period, known for his religious sacrilege, as in the Byzantine tradition.

Bashīr also features prominently and separately in the Islamic tradition in a dialogue, edited by Sidney Griffith, with a Muslim *mutakallim*—i.e., a trained dialectician—called Wāṣil al-Dimashqī. Griffith hesitantly identifies this figure as Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā, the famous thinker who was foundational to the Mu‘tazila theological school.⁹⁷ This text was originally written probably in the ninth century.⁹⁸ The dialogue follows a clear formula, as Wāṣil, a captured prisoner of war and master of the dialectical science

95 S. H. Griffith, “Bashīr/Bēsēr: Boon Companion of the Byzantine Emperor Leo III; The Islamic Recension of His Story in *Leiden Oriental Ms 951* (2),” *Le Muséon* 103 (1990): 295. See also S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Leo III: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain, 1973), 189–98, for a discussion of Beser in the sources, and his possible (unlikely) connection to a Jewish soothsayer, the so-called Tassarokontapechys.

96 Also apparently taking the story from (the reconstructed) Theophilus of Edessa, Theophanes mentions this event but without recalling Beser. Griffith, “Bashīr/Bēsēr,” 295; R. Hoyland, trans. and ed., *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Liverpool, 2011), 233–34. Hoyland credits the lost chronicle of Dionysios of Tel-Mahre with the transmission of this story about Bashīr to the two later Syriac chronicles mentioned above (233 n. 663). On the trope of rebels impersonating dead emperors, in this case with respect to Thomas the Slav, see J. S. Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilus and the East, 829–842: Court and Frontier in Byzantium during the Last Phase of Iconoclasm*, BBOS 13 (Farnham, 2014), 183–214, esp. 190 for his discussion of Beser.

97 Griffith’s proposed identification of this figure is conjectural, as not much is known of Wāṣil; see Reynolds, *Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu* (n. 37 above), 29.

98 Griffith, “Bashīr/Bēsēr,” 299–302.

92 Greek text from C. De Boor, ed., *Theophanis chronographia* (Leipzig, 1883), 402; trans. from C. Mango and R. Scott, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Oxford, 1997), 555.

93 Ibid., 559–60.

94 Ibid., 575; Nikephoros, *Short History*, 64.16–19.

of *kalām*, defeats a series of Christians in discussing various points of Christian-Islamic theological tension, confounding and silencing them with superior argumentation. It culminates in Wāṣil convincing the Byzantine emperor of the idolatry of the contemporary Christian Church, and thus figuring Wāṣil to be the cause of Byzantine iconoclasm.⁹⁹ While merely an ancillary character to the dialogue, a description of the story of Bashīr begins the dialogue, heavily reminiscent of Theophanes' tale:

اسر غلام من بني بطارقة الروم وكان غلاماً جميلاً فلما صاروا الى دار السلام وقع الى الخليفة وذلك في ولاية بني امية قسماه بشيراً. وأمر به الى الكتاب فكتب وقرأ القرآن وروي الشعر وقاس وطلب احاديث وحج. فلما بلغ واجتمع اتاه الشيطان فوسوس اليه وذكره النصرانية دين ابائه. فهرب مرتدّاً من دار الاسلام الى ارض الروم للذي سبق له في ام الكتاب. فاتى به ملك الطاغية فسأله عن حاله وما كان فيه وما الذي دعاه الى الدخول في النصرانية. فاخبره برغبته فيه فعظم في عين الملك فروسه وصيّره بطريقاً من بطارقتة واقطعه قرى كثيرة وهي اليوم تعرف به يقال لها قرى بشير.

There was a youth captured from the patricians of the Rūm, who was a handsome youth. When they came to the "Abode of Peace" he was allocated to the caliph.¹⁰⁰ This was during the rule of the Umayyads. He gave him the name Bashīr and remanded him to the care of the scribes. He learned to write, he recited the *Qur'ān*, he declaimed poetry, he compared and went in search of traditions, and he went on pilgrimage. When he came of age and matured, Satan approached him. He whispered to him and made him recall Christianity, the religion of his fathers. So he fled an apostate from the abode of Islam into the territory of the Rūm, to the one to whom he had previously belonged according to the Mother of the Book (i.e., originally). He brought him to the tyrant king. He asked him about his situation, what he was about, and what had prompted him to enter into Christianity. So he told him about his desire for it. And he gained stature in the eye of the king, so he gave him a title and he made him one of

his patricians and granted him many villages. Even until today, they are known in reference to him, being called the villages of Bashīr.¹⁰¹

Bashīr, silenced in his debate with Wāṣil, then brings a priest to debate the Muslim theologian, whose victory over the priest on the subject of baptism causes the narrator to remark, "Bashīr fell back on his cushion and he put his sleeve into his mouth and he began to laugh. He said to the Priest, 'Stand up, God shame you, I summoned you to convert him to Christianity, and now you have become a Muslim.'" ¹⁰² As opposed to the negative light in which Theophanes and Nikephoros portray Beser, to the Muslim audience of this dialogue, Bashīr represents, in the words of Griffith, "a friendly figure of manifest good will."¹⁰³

The story from Theophanes and the dialogue from the Islamic tradition together paint a rather distinct picture of this man. There is no reason to doubt Beser's historicity nor his identity as an Arab Christian. Moreover, the story that he was a Christian captured by Islamic forces who converted to Islam, and turned apostate back to Christianity is in no way impossible. All of this creates a fascinating lens through which to view the sigillographic evidence: we have a clearly identifiable figure associated directly with the beginning of the first iconoclast movement, raised in Syria and influenced by the Islamic tradition, accustomed to using aniconic coins with circular scriptural quotations,¹⁰⁴ who chooses to put psalms on his seals. And moreover, through Yazīd and Beser, there is a plausible link between these psalm seals and the apotropaic amulet tradition of late antique Syria.

Yet more importantly, both Beser and Yazīd served Leo III as imperial officials, as did another known psalm seal owner, Sisinnios, *patrikios* and *strategos*. Based on the dating of his seals (nos. 14–15), Sisinnios can be identified as the general and relative of Leo III, the first attested *strategos* of the Thrakesioi,

101 Griffith, "Bashīr/Bēsēr," 315. Here, Griffith and L. B. Miller provide the Arabic text of this dialogue with an English translation, 315–27.

102 Ibid., 321.

103 Ibid., 293–94.

104 Aniconic Islamic coins were widespread in the Islamic world since the coin reforms of 'Abd al-Malik in the 690s. See M. Bates, "History, Geography and Numismatics in the First Century of Islamic Coinage," *Revue suisse de numismatique* 65 (1986): 231–62.

99 Ibid., 325–27.

100 Griffith notes, "In the margin: 'It was 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān.'" Chronologically, this does not fit, as he died in 705, a decade before Leo III took power.

who helped defeat the revolt of Artabasdos before Constantine V had him killed for plotting against him.¹⁰⁵ While Sisinnios and Beser are the only independently identifiable captains of Leo III among our psalm seal owners, we can also associate the other two *patrikioi* and *strategoi* with either Leo or his son Constantine V, based on the stylistic similarities that place these seals in the same era and their shared high title and position. These are the aforementioned Epiphanius and a second individual, whose name monogram cannot be resolved. As this was the early eighth century, these individuals were among the mere handful of *strategoi* that held office at any given time.¹⁰⁶ As *hypatoi*, Peter, Theodosios, and Theodotos all held a title arguably even higher than *strategos* in their functions within the Byzantine civil administration,¹⁰⁷ thus making it exceedingly likely that they would have conformed to and supported Leo III's policies. The similar peculiarities shared by these seals indicate that the psalm seal owners were connected to each other socially and temporally.¹⁰⁸ And based on the seals' ideological connections with the iconoclast movement, and associations with leading lay officials under Leo,

105 On his joining Constantine, see Theophanes, AM 6233; on his execution by Constantine after the successful defeat of Artabasdos, see Theophanes, AM 6235 and Nikephoros, *Short History*, 66.24–26, who says that Sisinnios was killed because he was found guilty of plotting against Constantine. For a further discussion of Sisinnios's relation to Leo III and Constantine V, his possible conspiracy ca. 742, and a discussion of the sources regarding these events, see Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm* (n. 97 above), 21–22; P. Speck, *Artabasdos, der rechtgläubige Vorkämpfer der göttlichen Lehren: Untersuchungen zur Revolte des Artabasdos und ihrer Darstellung in der byzantinischen Historiographie* (Bonn, 1981), 33–37, 42–44.

106 While there were not a large number of *strategoi* in this period, Brubaker and Haldon argue (*Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 734–39), the fact that the office of *strategos* on seals is not typically tied to a region in this time is evidence that they commanded specific armies. Thematic *strategoi* connected to a certain locale did not feature until the early 9th century. While this may be the case, their argument does not sufficiently take into account the fact that it was common practice in seals from the 6th through the 8th centuries to list an office without detailing further specifics of its attachments, unlike seals of the middle Byzantine era.

107 Ibid., 583.

108 Metcalf, *Seals from Cyprus* (n. 4 above), no. 1009, suggests this relatively forcefully, and even goes so far as to say that all the non-*strategoi* psalm seal owners must have worked under the *strategoi*. This is unlikely, as their offices do not place them within the provincial or military hierarchy. However, the social connection between these individuals is more than likely.

these psalm seals can be viewed as expressions of iconoclast power and ideology.

Conclusion

While our sample size is small, to have two Arabic speakers out of twelve individuals is surprising, even despite the relatively large percentage of foreign officials in the eighth-century Byzantine hierarchy.¹⁰⁹ My goal in this paper has been neither to rewrite the modern scholarly understanding of the birth of Byzantine iconoclasm nor to forge a causal relationship between the imperial iconoclasts of Byzantium and the Caliphate, since modern scholarship has illustrated that this was not the case.¹¹⁰ Yet while the direct influence of Islam or Judaism on Byzantine iconoclasm has been rightly discounted, aniconic tendencies among some eastern Chalcedonian Christians must be taken into account, as can be seen in the gradual, localized, and non-imperial aniconism of eighth-century Palestine.¹¹¹ These seals do not necessarily disclose opinions generally held in eighth-century Byzantium, but show us a certain expression of the ideology of this particular grouping within the imperial service elite who used this sigillographic style, grounded in

109 Ibid., 584–91, for a discussion on the relative percentage jump in foreign officials within the Byzantine bureaucracy from the 7th to the 8th century. However, most of the foreign officials discussed are not Arabs, and thus it is remarkable that two of the twelve psalm seal owners are.

110 Most recently, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 105–6. They sum up nicely the modern understanding that clearly Christians, Jews, and Muslims were aware of each other's beliefs, and of course featured in the intellectual discourse of the age. Indeed, while there was clearly influence between the art and theologies of Christianity and Islam, those scholars who followed the iconophilic understanding of the outright causality of Byzantine iconoclasm from external sources have been disproven.

111 Ibid., 105–17. Palestinian "iconoclasm" was a different phenomenon from Byzantine iconoclasm and was apparently the result of local decision making, not the edicts of the Byzantine emperor or the caliph; see L. Brubaker, "Representation c. 800: Arab, Byzantine, Carolingian," in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 52–55. The attack (of probable historicity) on images by the Caliph Yazid (720–724 CE) was clearly an exceptional instance; G. R. D. King, "Islam, Iconoclasm, and the Declaration of Doctrine," *BSOAS* 48, no. 2 (1985): 267. On this decree and for a recent survey of the evidence for both Melkite iconophilia and iconophobia more generally, see J. S. Codoñer, "Melkites and Icon Worship during the Iconoclastic Period," *DOP* 67 (2013): 135–87.

iconoclast thought, as a means of personal piety and propaganda. These are rare primary sources that survive from the first generation of Byzantine lay iconoclast elites, a source for their self-presentation, free from the bias of iconophile sources. These individuals placed psalms upon their seals as the ultimate form of prayer, the one most suited to the Byzantines' position as the new Israelites. These psalms fit well within the cultivated logic of early iconoclasm: these Byzantine officials requested the help of the Lord to protect them from the evil that constantly threatened, whether in war, politics, or religion. These seals served political

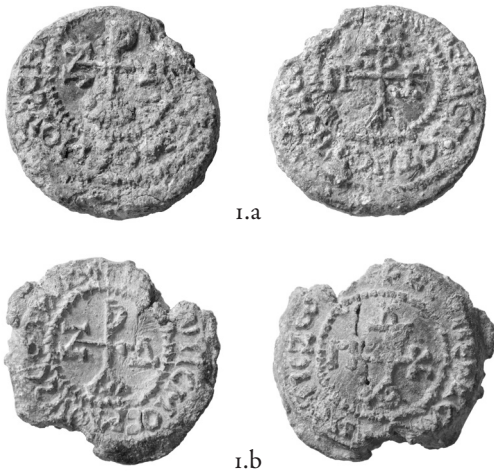
and precatory goals and, moreover, as sources directly attributable to imperial officials under Leo III, give us a glimpse of the ideology of the developing service elite, otherwise nearly invisible to history due to the polemics of iconophiles, in the early stages of the iconoclast era.

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Appendix

Catalogue of Psalm Seals

1. Azdras (?) patrikios (eighth century, second quarter)



(a) BZS.1951.31.5.2600—D. 29 mm.

(b) BZS.1958.106.929—D. 33 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery (n. 2 above), no. 579a–b. Parallels seals in C. Sode and P. Speck, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel in Berlin*, vol. 2 (Bonn, 1997), no. 211; Koltsida-Makre, *Βυζαντινά μολυβδόβουλλα: συλλογής Ορφανίδη-Νικολαΐδη, Νομισματικού Μουσείου Αθηνών* (Athens, 1996), nos. 173–74; K. M. Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντιακά μολυβδόβουλλα τοῦ ἐν Ἀθῆναις Ἐθνικοῦ Νομισματικοῦ Μουσείου* (Athens, 1917), no. 905. Zacos mentions three other specimens. Cf. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus* (n. 2 above), nos. 1168–69.

Obv.: Cruciform monogram, reading Ἀζδρα(ς). Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+Κ..ΩΤΙCΜΟCΜΟVΖCΟΤΗΡΜΘ

Rev.: Cruciform monogram, reading πατρικίου. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΚCΥΠΕΡΑCΠΙCΤΗCΤΗCΖΩ....

Ἀζδρα(ς) πατρικίου.

Κ(ύριο)[ς φ]ωτισμός μου (καὶ) σοτήρ μου, Κ(ύριο)ς ὑπερασπιστῆς τῆς ζω[ῆς] μου].

(Seal of) Azdras(?) patrikios.

The Lord is my light and my savior, the Lord is my life's protector.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 26:1 that begins on the obverse and continues on the reverse. The name monogram is uncertain, as it would represent a unique monogram and indeed, a unique name in the period. Konstantopoulos did not attempt to resolve this name monogram, but “Azdras” was first proposed by Zacos-Veglery, who mentioned Ezdras as an alternate form of Esdras (Ezra); Koltsida-Makre and Sode followed Zacos. With no apparent alternative and as the monogram is inscribed clearly on multiple specimens, “Azdras” is begrudgingly accepted here in favor of any more unlikely resolutions (e.g., Ζαρίδα). See n. 88 above.

2. Beser, patrikios and strategos (eighth century, before ca. 742)

(a) BZS.1958.106.1835—D. 31 mm.

(b) BZS.1951.31.5.2822—D. 27 mm.

(c) BZS.1958.106.2308—D. 30 mm; field 25 mm.

Unpublished. Parallels in Zacos-Veglery, no. 2835a–b; Sode and Speck, *Berlin*, 2: no. 212; A.-K. Wassiliou and W. Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich*, vol. 2 (Vienna, 2004), no. 284; Metcalf, *Seals from Cyprus* (n. 4 above), no. 1009. Cf. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus*, no. 750.



Obv.: Cruciform monogram, reading βησήρ. In the four angles of the cruciform, a cross. Between two linear borders, a circular inscription:

+ΕΞΕ.Ξ.ΕΚΕ..ΑΝΘΡΟΠΩΝ...

Rev.: Cruciform monogram, reading πατρικίου. In the four angles of the cruciform, CT-PA-TH-ΓΘ. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΩCΔΟΛΙΩΡΥCΕΜΕ

Βήσηρ, πατρικίου (καὶ) στρατηγού.

Ἐξε[λ]οῦ [μ]ε, Κ(ύρι)ε, [ἐξ] ἀνθρώπου πον[ηροῦ],
ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου (καὶ) δολίου ῥύσέ με.

(Seal of) Beser, patrikios and strategos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. This Beser, discussed at length above, is a notorious figure in the beginnings of iconoclasm. See Griffith, “Bashīr/Bēsēr”; Gero, *Leo III*, 189–98 (both n. 95 above); Speck, *Artabasdos*, 75–77 (n. 105 above).

3. Constantine (eighth century, second quarter)



Private collection—D. 31 mm.

Ed. Seibt and Zarnitz, *Kunstwerk*, no. 4.2.10. My reading is based on that of Seibt and Zarnitz.

Obv.: Invocative monogram (type V), reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, a cross. Wreath border.

Rev.: Cruciform monogram, reading Κωνσταντίνω. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

.....ΜΕΝΗΕ.ΦΘΟΡΑCΤΗΝΨΥΧΗ...

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Κωνσταντίνω.

[Λυτροῦ]μένη ἐ[κ] φθορᾶς τὴν ψυχή[ν μου].

Theotokos, help Constantine.

(The Virgin) redeeming our souls from death.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 102:4 mixed with a quotation from the *apolytikion* sung at the *Koimesis* on the reverse. The subject of the participle is the Virgin on the obverse, not the Lord as in the Psalm. The inscription replaces the “θανάτου” of the *troparion* with “φθορᾶς” of the Psalm.

4. Demetrios (?) eparch (?) (eighth century, second quarter)

BZS.1951.315.3700—D. 28 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 3015.

Obv.: Cruciform monogram, reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:



+ΚC..ΤΙCΜΟCΜΟΝSCΟΤΗΡΜ.

Rev.: Block monogram, reading Δημητρίου ἐπάρχου.
Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΚCΝΠΕΡΑCΠΙCΤΙCΤΙCΖ...ΜΘ

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Δημητρίου(?) ἐπάρχου(?).

Κύριος [φω]τισμός μου (καὶ) σοτήρ μ[ου], Κύριος
ὑπερασπιστὴς τὴς ζ[ωῆς] μου.

Theotokos, help Demetrios(?) eparch(?).

The Lord is my light and my savior, the Lord is
my life's protector.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 26:1 that begins on the obverse and continues on the reverse. The presence of a block monogram on an eighth-century seal is clearly an archaizing touch. The resolution of this complex block monogram cannot be accepted with certainty; Zacos reads and accepts it, without mentioning alternatives, such as Μιχαὴλ ἐπάρχου or Θεοπέμπτου χαρτουλαρίου. For this purpose, the reading is only provisionally accepted.

5. Epiphanyios, patrikios and strategos (eighth century, second quarter)

(a) BZS.1958.106.5235—D. 30 mm.

(b) BZS.1958.106.5449—D. 35 mm; field 25 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 323a–b. Parallel seal in J.-C. Cheynet, T. Gökyıldırım, and V. Bulgurlu, *Les sceaux byzantins du Musée archéologique d'Istanbul* (Istanbul, 2012), no. 2.236. Zacos mentions one additional specimen.



5.a



5.b

Obv.: Cruciform monogram, reading Ἐπιφάνιου.
Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΕΞΕΛΘΜΕΚΕΕΞΑΝΘΡΟΠΩΠΟΝΗΡΩΝ

Rev.: Cruciform monogram, reading πατρικίου. In the four angles of the cruciform, SCT–ΡΑ–ΤΗ–ΓΘ.
Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΘΖΔΟΛΙΘΡΝCΕΜΕ

Ἐπιφάνιου, πατρικίου (καὶ) στρατηγού.

Ἐξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονηροῦ, ἀπὸ
ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου (καὶ) δολίου ῥύσέ με.

Epiphanyios, patrikios and strategos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an
unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. The same individual is likely represented by a number of seals; Zacos-Veglery, nos. 2990, 3103; Schlumberger, *Sigillographie* (n. 56 above), 364; B. A. Pančenko, *Katalog molivdovulov* (Sofia, 1908), no. 445; V.S. Šandrovskaja, "Sfragistika," in *Iskusstvo Vizantii v sobranijach SSSR (Katalog vystavki)*, 3 vols. (Moscow, 1977), 2: no. 455. Of particular interest is Zacos-Veglery, no. 2990, a distinctive seal bearing the inscription Ἰησοῦ Χριστὲ νικᾷς in the angles of a crosslet on the obverse.

6. Iezid, hypatos and imperial spatharios
(eighth century, second quarter)



6.a



6.b



6.c



(a) BZS.1958.106.4684—D. 24 mm.

(b) BZS.1958.106.5485—D. 31 mm.

(c) BZS.1947.2.875—D. 22 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1985a.

Obv.: Cruciform Invocative monogram, reading Κύριε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι-Ε-Ζ-ΙΔ. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΕΞΕΛΘΜΑΙΚΕΕΚΤΩΝΕΧΘΡΩΝΜΟΝ

Rev.: Inscription in four lines. Wreath border.

ΥΠΑΤΩ
ΚΑΙΒΑ
ΛΙΚΩ
ΑΘΑΡΙΩ

Κύριε βοήθει Ιεζιδ, υπάτω και βασιλικῶ
σπαθαρίω.

Ἐξελοῦμαι, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου.

Lord, help Iezid, hypatos and imperial
spatharios.

Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies.



6.d



6.e



6.f



6.g



(d) BZS.1955.1.1326—D. 29 mm.

(e) BZS.1955.1.1327—D. 25 mm.

(f) BZS.1955.1.1328—D. 27 mm.

(g) BZS.1958.106.4862—D. 32 mm; field 18 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1985b. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1985c represents a similar specimen from a different boulloterion on a smaller blank.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Κύριε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι-Ε-Ζ-ΙΔ. Between two wreath borders, a retrograde circular inscription:

+ΕΞΕΛΘΜΑΙΚΕΕΚΤΩΝΕΧΘΡΩΝΜΟΝ

Rev.: Same as (a) and (b).

Κύριε βοήθει Ιεζιδ, υπάτω και βασιλικῶ
σπαθαρίω.

Ἐξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐκ τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου.

Lord, help Iezid, hypatos and imperial
spatharios.

Deliver me, O Lord, from my enemies.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 142:9 on the reverse. This seal, and nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10 all represent the same individual, Yazīd (spelled in a variety of ways in Greek). A bilingual Greco-Arabic seal of the same individual is found in Jena: Heidemann and Sode, “Christlich-orientalische Bleisiegel” (n. 91 above), no. 1. For a discussion of the seals of this individual, see Zacos-Veglery, no. 1984; Brubaker and Haldon (*Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era* [n. 1 above], 611) discuss him because his seals so effectively show his career path.

A number of specimens of this seal (d–g) contain a retrograde circular inscription; while this may be a mere engraver’s error, it is quite possible that this may reflect the native Arabic language of the seal owner—as is evident not only from his name, but his unique bilingual seal.

7. Iezid, hypatos and imperial spatharios (eighth century, second quarter)



Zacos-Veglery, no. 1984—D. 28 mm.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι-Ε-Ζ-ΗΘ. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΘCΔΟΛΙΘΡVCAIMΕ

Rev.: Inscription in five lines. Wreath border.

+ΠΑ

ΤΩΚΑΙ
ΒΑCΙΛΙΚ
ΩCΠΑΘΑ
ΡΙΩ+

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ἰεζήθ, [ὅ]πάτω καὶ βασιλικῷ
σπαθαρίῳ.

Ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου (καὶ) δολίου ῥύσαι με.

Iezid, hypatos and imperial spatharios.

From an unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. On Iezid, see no. 6 above.

8. Iezid, imperial spatharios and komes of the imperial stables (eighth century, second quarter)

(a) BZS.1955.1.1329—D. 29 mm.

(b) BZS.1955.1.1330—D. 32 mm; field 23 mm.

(c) BZS.1955.1.1331—D. 34 mm; field 21 mm.

(d) BZS.1955.1.1332—D. 30 mm.



8.a



8.b



8.c



8.d

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1986a–b. Zacos mentions two other specimens. Parallel seal in Laurent, *Corpus* (n. 65 above), 2: no. 916.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Κύριε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι–Ζ–Η–Θ. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΕΞΕΛΘΜΕΚΕΕΞΑΝΘΡΟΠΟΥΠΟΝΙΡΟΥ

Rev.: Inscription in six lines. Wreath border.

+ΒΑCΙΛΥ

CΠΑΘΑΡΙ

SKOMITI

ΤΩΝΒΑCΙ

CΤΑΥΛ

ΩΝ+

Κύριε βοήθει Ἰεζήθ, βασιλ(ικῶ) σπαθαρί(ω) (καὶ) κόμιτι τῶν βασ(ιλικῶν) σταύλων.

Ἐξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονιροῦ.

Lord, help Iezid, imperial spatharios and komes of the imperial stables.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the reverse. On Iezid, see no. 6 above.

9. Iezid, imperial spatharios and droungarios (eighth century, second quarter)



9.a

(a) BZS.1958.106.3540—D. 24 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1987a. Parallel in Wassiliou and Seibt, *Bleisiegel*, 2: no. 264.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι–Ε–Ζ–ΗΘ. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟΣ.....ΔΟΛΙΩΡΥCΑΙΜΕ

Rev.: Inscription in six lines. Wreath border.

ΒΑCΙ

ΛΙΚΩCΠ

ΑΘΑΡΙΩC

ΔΡΟΥΝΓ

ΑΡΙΩ+

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ἰεζήθ, βασιλικῶ σπαθαρίω (καὶ) δρουγγαρίω.

Ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς [ἀδίκου (καὶ)] δολίου ῥύσαι με.

Lord, help Iezid, imperial spatharios and droungarios.

From an unjust and deceitful man, save me.



9.b

(b) BZS.1955.1.1325—D. 29 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1987b. Cf. Wassiliou and Seibt, *Bleisiegel*, 2: no. 264.

Obv.: Same as (a), but in four angles of cruciform, Ι–Ε–Ζ–ΗΘ.

Rev.: Same as (b).

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. On Iezid, see no. 6 above.

10. Iezid, imperial spatharios and tourmarch (eighth century, second quarter)

Schlumberger, *Sigillographie*, 453 (not illustrated)—Unknown diameter.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Κύριε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ι–Ε–Ζ–ΙΔ. Between two wreath borders, a circular psalmic inscription (?).

Rev.: Inscription in six lines. Wreath border.

.....

ΛΙΚΩCΠ.
ΘΑΡΙΩC
ΤΟΥΡΜΑ
ΡΧΗ+

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Ἰεζίδ, [βασι]λικῶ σπ[α]θαρίῳ
(καὶ) τουρμαρχῇ.

...

Lord, help Iezid, imperial spatharios and
tourmarch.

...

Commentary: This seal, current location unknown, is difficult to discuss because it is only mentioned and not illustrated by Schlumberger, who, writing in the late nineteenth century, did not give the now-conventional information about the seal and its inscriptions. Schlumberger mentions that he could not read the circular inscription, but does not give any indications as to what letter forms may be visible. It was likely a psalmic inscription based on the other seals of Iezid that share the same style. This seal attests to an important step in the career of Iezid. On Iezid, see no. 6 above.

11. Moschos (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1951.315.3701—D. 28 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 3063.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Ἀγία Τριάς. In the four angles of the cruciform, Ω-ΘC-ΗM-ΩP. Circular inscription: ..ΞΕΛΟΘΜΕΚ.ΡΙΕΞΑΝΘΡΟΠΟΝΠΟ.....
All within wreath border.

Rev.: Cruciform monogram: τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Μόσχῳ. In the four angles of the cruciform, Β-Ω-ΗΘ-ΕΙ. Circular inscription:

....ΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚ.....ΞΡVCE Μ. .
All within wreath border.

Ἀγία Τριάς, ὦ Θ(εὸ)ς ἡμῶν <ν> βοήθει τῷ σῷ
δούλῳ Μόσχῳ.

[Ε]ξελοῦ με, Κ[ύ]ριε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πο[νηροῦ],
[ἀπὸ] ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκ[ου (καὶ) δολί]ου ῥύσέ μ[ε].

Holy Trinity, our God, help your servant
Moschos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an
unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: Zacos reads the reverse monogram as “Moschos chartoularios,” however the Α he reads at the bottom is a Δ, thus making the most likely reading, “τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Μόσχῳ.” Also note the mistake in the obverse inscription within the angles of the monogram, where a P is inscribed in the place of a N. The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse.

12. Peter hypatos (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1947.2.1770—D. 34 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 3163.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Χριστέ βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, Π-.-TP-Ω. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:
....ΛΘΜΕΚΕΞΑΝΘΡΩΠΟΝΗΡΞ

Rev.: Cruciform monogram: τῷ δούλῳ σου. In the four angles of the cruciform, V-Π-T-Ω. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΩCΔΟΛΙΩΡΥ...

Χριστέ βοήθει Π[έ]τρῳ τῷ δούλῳ σου, ὑπάτῳ.

[Ἐξέ]λοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρ(ώπο)υ πονηροῦ, ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου (καὶ) δολίου ῥύ[σέ με].

Christ, help your Peter, your servant, hypatos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. The reverse of this seal is strange, although the suggestion of Zacos on its reading seems likely: the monogram is indecipherable unless the left arm containing an A is ignored—an act which is typically anathema in monogrammatic resolutions. Thus, the monogram would be read as τῷ δούλῳ σου (more likely than τῷ σῷ δούλῳ as this occurs after the name within the syntax of the inscription). Then, using the A from the left arm of the cruciform monogram, the inscription in the angles can find its vowel and be read as ὑπάτῳ.

13. Sergios, imperial strator (eighth century, second quarter)



Zacos-Veglery, no. 3046A—D. 28 mm.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Χριστέ βοήθει. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΤΩΔΔΛΩCΩCΕΡΓΙΩBAC†CTPATOPI

Rev.: Inscription in six lines. Wreath border.

+KCE
MOIBOHΘ
OCSΩΦOBH
ΘHCOMETI
ΠOIHCEIM
OIANOC

Χριστέ βοήθει τῷ δούλῳ σου Σεργίῳ βασ(ιλικῷ) στρατορί.

Κ(ύρι)ος ἐμοὶ βοηθὸς (καὶ) οὐ φοβηθήσομε τι ποιήσει μοι ἄν(θρωπ)ος.

Christ, help your servant Sergios imperial strator.

The Lord is a helper to me and I will not fear what a person may do to me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 117:6 in a linear inscription on the reverse. This seal is unique in containing the psalmic quotation in a linear—not circular—inscription.

14. Sisinnios, patrikios and strategos (before ca. 744)



BZS.1947.2.1279—D. 30 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 3180. Related seal in Seibt-Zarnitz, *Kunstwerk*, 4.2.7.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. In the four angles of the cruciform, ΤΩ-Ω-Δ-ΛΩ. Between two borders of dots, a circular inscription:

..ΞΕΛΩΜΕΚΕΕΞΑΝΘΡΟΠΩΠΟΝΙΡΩ

Rev.: Inscription in five lines. Between two borders of dots, a circular inscription:

...ΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΥCΔΟΛΙΥΡΥCΕ..

CICI
NNIΩΠ
ΑΤΡΙΚΙΩ
SCTPAT
ΗΓΩ

Θεοτόκε βοήθει τῷ σῶ δούλῳ Σισσινίῳ πατρικίῳ
(καὶ) στρατηγῷ.

[Ε]ξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονιροῦ, [ἀπ]ὸ
ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου (καὶ) δολίου ῥύσέ [με].

Theotokos, help your servant Sisinnios patrikios
and strategos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an
unjust and deceitful man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. This seal and no. 15 probably represent the first *strategos* of the Thrakesioi, Leo III's relative Sisinnios, executed before 744 for his supposed plotting against Constantine V in the wake of the failed rebellion of Artabasdos. See S. Gero, *Byzantine Iconoclasm during the Reign of Constantine V: With Particular Attention to the Oriental Sources* (Louvain, 1977), 21–22; Speck, *Artabasdos*, 33–37, 42–44; Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, 160.

15. Sisinnios, patrikios and strategos (eighth century, before ca. 744)



Zacos-Veglery, no. 2373—D. 31 mm.

Parallel seal in Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντινὰ μολυβδόβουλλα*, no. 154a

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading
Θεοτόκε βοήθει. In the four angles of the

cruciform, CI–CIN–NI–Ω. Between two
wreath borders, a circular inscription.

+ΕΞΕΛΘΜΕΚΕΕΞΑΝΘΡΟΠΩΠΟΝΙΡΩ

Rev.: Inscription in four lines. Between two wreath
borders, a circular inscription:

+ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΟΝΡΥCΕΜΕ

ΠΑΤ
Ρ.ΚΙΩC
C.ΡΑΤ
ΗΓΩ

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Σισσινίῳ πατρ[ι]κίῳ (καὶ) σ[τ]
ρατηγῷ.

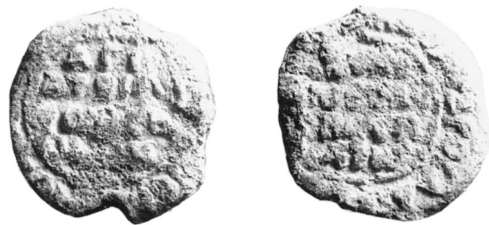
Ἐξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονιροῦ, ἀπὸ
ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου ῥύσέ με.

Theotokos, help Sisinnios patrikios and
strategos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, from an
unjust man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from
Psalm 139:1 that begins on the obverse and con-
tinues on the reverse. Regarding Sisinnios, see
no. 14 above.

16. Theodosios hypatos (eighth century, second quarter)



(a) Sode and Speck, *Berlin*, 2: no. 457—D. 26 mm.

(b) Konstantopoulos, *Βυζαντινὰ μολυβδόβουλλα*,
no. 578—D. 31 mm (not pictured).

Obv.: Inscription in four lines.

ΑΓΙ
ΑΤΡΙΑ
CΘΕΗ
ΜΩΝ

Rev.: Inscription in four lines. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

ΑΠΟΑΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚ . . .

ΒΟΗΘ
ΗΘΕΟΔΟ
CΙΩΝΠ
ΑΤΩ

Ἄγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, βοήθει Θεοδοσίῳ
ὑπάτῳ.

Ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου ῥῦσαί με].

Holy Trinity, our God, help Theodosios hypatos.
From an unjust man, save me.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from either Psalm 139:1 or Psalm 42:1 in the circular inscription on the reverse—the identification of the quotation cannot be determined from the visible letters, but based on the ascertainable length of the inscription, Psalm 139:1 seems more likely. The invocation to the Holy Trinity on the obverse is a clear indication of the seal owner's iconoclastic convictions.

17. Theodosios (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1951.31.5.3242—D. 2.6 mm.

Unpublished.

Obv.: Cruciform invective monogram, reading Ἄγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, βοήθει. Between two borders of dots, a circular inscription:

. . . Θ . . . Ο . . .

Rev.: Cruciform monogram, reading Θεοδοσίῳ. Between two borders of dots, a circular inscription:

. . . ΡΙCΕΜ . . .

Ἄγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, βοήθει Θεοδοσίῳ.

[Ἐξελοῦ με, Κύριε, ἐξ ἀν[θρώπου π]ο[νηροῦ], ῥίσε
μ[ε, Κύριε, ἀπὸ ἀνδρὸς ἀδίκου ?].

Holy Trinity, our God, help Theodosios.

[Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, save me,
Lord, from an evil man. (?)]

Commentary: The seal may contain a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse and a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse. While the identification of the inscription cannot be assuredly determined, the visible letters make this most likely. The location of the start of the inscription cannot be determined. The invocation to the Holy Trinity on the obverse is a clear indication of the seal owner's iconoclastic convictions, likely the aforementioned Theodosios (no. 16), whose seal contains the same rare invocation.

18. Theodotos hypatos (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1958.106.5105—D. 2.5 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 1647.

Obv.: Cruciform invective monogram, reading Θεοτόκε βοήθει. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΘΞΕΛΘΜ . . .

Rev.: Inscription in four lines. Between two wreath borders, a circular inscription:

+ΡΙC.....ΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΘ

ΘΕΟ
ΔΟΤΘ
ΥΠΑΤ
ΧΘΧ

Θεοτόκε βοήθει Θεοδότου ὑπάτου.

Ἐξελοῦ μ[ε, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπου πονηροῦ], ρίσ[αί
με, Κύριε (?), ἀπὸ ἀν]δρὸς ἀδίκου.

Theotokos, help. [Seal] of Theodotos hypatos.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person, save me,
Lord, from an unjust man.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse that is continued on the reverse by what seems to be a metricized version of next part of the verse. Based on the fronting of the “ῥῦσαί με” and the remaining space in the circular inscription, Zacos’s reading does not seem at all unlikely. Nevertheless, his insertion of the vocative “Κύριε” is purely speculative but tempting, because it would mirror the vocatives often found in metrical inscriptions in that part of the line, and attest the tendency to modify Psalm verses to make them fit typical meters. This reading of the reverse circular inscription would result in a tridecasyllable.

19. Uncertain (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1947.2.1303—D. 28 mm.

Ed. Zacos-Veglery, no. 3068.

Obv.: Cruciform invocative monogram, reading
Θεοτόκε βοήθει. Between two borders of dots,
circular inscription beginning at nine o’clock:
+ΟΛ...ΞΕΩΝΒΟΗΘΟΟΚΚΠΘ

Rev.: Cruciform monogram with an uncertain
resolution. Between two borders of dots, a
circular inscription:

ΚΣΕΜΗΒΟΗΘΟΟΞΦΟΒΙΘΙC

Θεοτόκε βοήθει...

Ὁ Λ[όγος] (?) ἐμὴ βοηθός κ(αὶ) ... (?), Κ(ύριος)
ἐμὴ βοηθός, οὐ φοβιθίσ(ομαι).

Theotokos, help...

The Logos is my helper and ... (?), the Lord is my
helper, I will not fear.

Commentary: The seal contains a quotation from Psalm 117:6 on the reverse, which is apparently mirrored on the obverse by a paraphrase of the same quotation, except with the replacement of the psalmic *Kurios* with the Johannine *Logos*; the word *logos*, restored by Zacos, seems by far the most likely reading based on the size of the epigraphic gap and the context. Zacos read the last word as “σῶσον,” which in addition to not being on the seal, makes no syntactic sense within the inscription, although unfortunately I cannot suggest a better reading for the fractured last few letters. I have suggested that the Κ after the word “βοηθός” is likely an abbreviation for καὶ, followed by some noun parallel to βοηθός. An additional problem is presented by the reverse monogram, which, although clearly imprinted, cannot be deciphered. It is possible that it is intended to read Κωνσταντίνου, and that the apparent P is meant to be a backwards C, similar to the Ϡ in the bottom arm of the obverse cruciform monogram, or the W in the obverse circular inscription.

20. ... patrikios (eighth century, second quarter)

Metcalf, *Seals from Cyprus*, no. 236—D. 26 mm;
23 mm.

Obv.: Cruciform monogram with an uncertain
resolution. Circular inscription:

ΚVΠΙΟCΦ.....Ϡ. All within wreath border.

Rev.: Cruciform monogram reading πατρικίου.
Circular inscription:

Κ. . . ΦΟΒΙΘΙCΟM. All within wreath border.

... πατρικίου.

Κύριος φ[ωτισμός μου (καὶ) σοτήρ μ (?)]ου,
Κ[ύριος ἐμοὶ βοηθός, οὐ (?)] φοβηθίσωμ[ε].

(Seal of) . . . patrikios

The Lord is my light and my savior (?). The Lord
is my helper (?) I will not fear.

Commentary: The seal, found at Khlorakas in Cyprus, may contain quotations from Psalm 26:1 in a circular inscription on the obverse, and Psalm 117:6 on the reverse. Both psalm quotations are printed with a degree of uncertainty, because of the fractional nature of the circular inscriptions. These suggestions of Metcalf seem quite possible, based on the attestations of these two psalms on other seals; however, as this would be the only instance of these two psalms being juxtaposed, I cannot be all too certain of these readings. Additionally, if Psalm 26 is present on the obverse, then it is possible that the apparent “φοβηθήσομαι” on the reverse represents a paraphrase of the continuation of that verse (“... τίνα φοβηθήσομαι”), perhaps with a vocative Κύριε inserted at the beginning.

21. . . hypatos and imperial (?) spatharios (eighth century, second quarter)



BZS.1951.31.5.3317—D. 24 mm.

Unpublished.

Obv.: Cruciform monogram with an uncertain resolution. In the four angles of the cruciform, T-Θ. Circular inscription:

. . . ΟΥΠΩΝ . . .

All within wreath border.

Rev.: Cruciform monogram reading βασιλικ(οῦ).

In the four angles of the cruciform,
.Π-ΑΘ-ΑΡ-ΙΘ. Circular inscription:

. . . ΝΔΡΟCΑΔΙΚΟ. . .

All within wreath border.

. . . [ὑπά]του (καὶ) βασιλικ(οῦ) [σ]παθαρίου

[Ἐξελοῦ με, Κ(ύρι)ε, ἐξ ἀνθρώπ]ου πον[ηροῦ] (?),
[ἀπὸ ἀ]νδρὸς ἀδίκου[υ (καὶ) δολίου ῥύσέ με] (?).

. . . hypatos and imperial spatharios.

Deliver me, Lord, from an evil person (?), from
an unjust and deceitful man, save me (?).

Commentary: Because of this specimen's fractional nature, this is the least certainly attributed of all the psalm seals. According to my reconstruction, this seal contains a quotation from Psalm 139:1 on the obverse with a combination of the continuation of Psalm 139:1 and Psalm 42:1 on the reverse—more likely than a mere continuation of Psalm 139:1 based on space. The obverse cruciform monogram contains a Λ in the left arm and an Ω in the lower arm—this can resolve to any number of extremely common names in the dative, such as Nicholas or Leontios. Or perhaps, as the title in the angles of the cruciform seems to be in the genitive—as is the title in the angles of the reverse—the name may be one of the many less common names which contain these two letters in the genitive. In the extant angles of the cruciform, the letters T-Θ likely form the end of the title *hypatos*. The reverse monogram is additionally uncertain—it most likely reads βασιλικοῦ, with a C at the top of the fractional upper arm of the monogram, which forms part of the title *imperial spatharios*.